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Editor-in-Chief
Harvinder Kour (JKAS)

Editor
Dr Abid Ahmad

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Mailing Address:
Editor English
J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages
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EDITORIAL

Among all human pursuits, art occupies a distinct niche. Life is more than art, and art is more than life. The two have a strange relationship where each complements and enriches the other. Where art subsists on life, the latter itself assumes more meaning with art. Art is a persistent human endeavour to search for meaning in an otherwise meaningless landscape.

Early human scribbling and doodling bear testimony to the fact that the urge for creative expression existed from the beginning. At its core, art embodies the human aspiration for beauty and delight, yet its expressions and varieties have made human civilization far richer than it would otherwise have been. That is why human evolution has seen monumental growth in artistic and creative accomplishments. In fact, the artistic imagination has been the main antecedent of innovation, creativity and originality in more substantial aspects of life like architecture, costume, lifestyle, cuisine, scientific achievements, and extra-terrestrial explorations.

To imagine life in general without humanity's creative feats renders it bare and barren, shorn of all colour, mirth and meaning.

Humanity has not only nurtured an abiding fascination for art, but has rejoiced in and cherished its celebration too.

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Even on occasions when art appears devoid of meaning, it never ceases to fascinate the creative sensibilities of humankind. Abstract art, without exception, is a celebration of the creative side of humanity, which captivates even when its meaning remains shrouded in mystery.

Poems, paintings, sculpture and a variety of creative realms have been flourishing throughout human history, bearing witness to the fact that creating art and celebrating it are two faces of the same coin.

In our regional context, too, there are creative forms that celebrate artistic pursuits. The need is to document such artefacts and creative pieces to preserve the rich heritage of our collective search for meaning and to inspire the contemporary and coming generations to continue the tradition.

Dr Abid Ahmad

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Articles

LORD RAM PROCEEDS TO HIS ETERNAL ABODE!

Suman K Sharma

[**Author's note**: The present paper is based on Maharishi Valmiki's *Ramayan,Part II*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur (Sankskrit-Hindi, 64th Edition), Samvat 2080. Notably, Valmiki treats Shri Ram as Bhagwan Vishnu, who takes birth as a human being and undergoes the trials and tribulations that a mortal can be subject to.]

Eons ago, in the *Treta Yuga*, Bhagwan Vishnu felt the need to appear on Earth to live the life of a man. Shri Ram was born. He rid the world of Ravan and other fearsome rakshasas who had been making life difficult on earth. Ascending to the Ayodhya throne, he performed *yagyas* for ten thousand years. (Valmiki Ramayan/Uttar Kand/99 (ix). Under his dispensation of the Ram Rajya, everyone lived a healthy, joyful and productive life. His brothers, Bharat and Shatrughan had made their own names as warriors. Bharat had subdued the Gandharvs and Gandhars and founded the famed cities of Takshila and Pushkalavati—both now in Pakistan (ibid/ Canto 101). Shri Ram had already enthroned Shatrughan in Madhupuri (the present-day Mathura), Lavanasur's vanquished city that was located on the banks of Yamuna (ibid/Canto 63).

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Lakshaman's sons Angad (not to be confused with Bali's son of the same name) and Chandraketu ruled the countries in Karupath (present-day Basti and Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh). As a son, a brother, a husband, a father, a warrior and the ruler of an expansive kingdom – he performed each of the roles, following scrupulously its dictates, though this gave immense pain more than once to him as a person and also to those who were close to his heart. He was the *Marayada Purshottam.*

A lonesome figure

Shri Ram had given himself a mandate: to live like a man who is prone to the pains and adversities that befall other mortals of this world. Hardly ever did he use his divine powers to achieve an end. In time, he became a solitary figure. His father, Raja Dashrath had passed on long back, as had his mother Kaushalya and the queens Sumitra and Kaikeyi. But his greatest loss was Sita's immersion into earth. Valmiki describes Shri Ram as leaning on a *goolar* (wild-fig) staff, shedding tears on Sita's voluntary submersion into the earth (ibid/Canto 98(ii). Even Lord Brahma could not assuage his pain. Shri Ram did not marry any other woman after his parting with Sita. If the spouse's presence was required during the performance of a yagya, he made do with a gold effigy of hers.

Yet an equally strong, if not severer, blow awaited Shri Ram. It was the loss of Lakshman, his inseparable brother, his alter ego. In Cantos 104-105 of the *Ramayan,* Maharishi Valmiki describes how destiny unfolds an elaborate stratagem[1] to carry out its design. The end result was that Shri Ram had to forsake Lakshman in his open durbar. "*Visarjaye tvam Saumitre...*" – O Son of Sumitra! I abandon you! – he pronounced with a heavy heart. Lakshman did not tarry long in the court after that. Going straight to the banks of the river Saryu, he rinsed his mouth, sat down calmly on the ground, and stopped breathing

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in the manner of an accomplished yogi.

They won't let him go alone

A Vishnu avatar Shri Ram was, yet He had to keep up the persona of a grievously hurt mortal. As a raja about to pass on, he made preparations for the ultimate voyage. Summoning his ministers, courtiers and the elite of his realm, he proclaimed his intention first to anoint Prince Bharat to succeed him on the Ayodhya throne and then follow the path that Lakshman had taken (ibid/107(iii).

But Bharat was not willing to live a moment longer than his cherished brother, Shri Ram. Overcome with insurmountable grief, Bharat said to him -

Satyenahm shape rajn svargbhogen chaiv hi/N kamye yatha rajaym tvam vina Raghunandan//

"O Raja! O Scion of the Raghus! I vow by Truth that I want no kingship without you, not even the enjoyment of the Swarga."

\- Ibid/107(vi)

On Bharat's advice, Shri Ram then anointed his twin sons, Kush and Luv, instead. Prince Kush was installed as the raja of Kushavati, a newly founded city situated on the ridge of the Vindhyas (in the present-day state of Karnataka), the southern part of the Kaushal realm; while Luv was enthroned in Shravasti, in the northern Kaushal (in the present-day Uttar Pradesh).

As stated above, Shri Ram's second surviving brother, Shatrughan ruled the distant Madhura (Mathura) at that time. Fast-moving messengers from Ayodhya rode three days and as many nights to reach him. Hearing the news of the denouement of his family, Shatrughan held a public audience. Before the assembled masses, he asked his purohit, Kanchan, to anoint both of his sons, Subhahu and Shatrughati. Subhahu was to

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rule Madhura and Shatrughati went on to reign over Vidisha (on the northeast of the present-day Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh).

Having performed his paternal duty, Shatrughan hastened to be with Shri Ram. There, with folded hands, he expressed his earnest desire to his older brother –

Kritvabhishekm sutyordvyo Raghavnandan/

Tvanugamne rajn viddhimam kritnishchaym//

"O Scion of the Raghus! I have come (to you) after anointing both my sons. O Raja! Consider me too as having a firm resolve to follow you."

Ibid/108(xiv)

The emotion-charged talk between Raja Ram and Shatrughan had hardly ended when there approached myriads of shape-changing Vanars, bears and rakshasas, led by Sugriv and Vibhishan. Like Shatrughan, Sugriv too had anointed Angad to succeed him before coming to Ayodhya. Everyone among them had but one prayer to make before the Raja Ram –

Tvanugamne rajan sampraptah sm smagata:/

Yadi Ram vinasmabhirgachchhestvm Purushottam/

Yamdandmivodyamy tvya sm vinipatitah//

"O Raja! All of us have come with the resolve to follow you. O best of men, Ram! If you go away without taking us along, we will feel as if you had felled us with the Mace of Death!"

-ibid/108(xx-xxi)

Then there were the people of Ayodhya, crestfallen to know that Ram was leaving them. They lay prostrate on the ground in grief. Seeing their plight, Muni Vashisht remonstrated with the departing raja, "Ram! Look at these men, women and children. Young and old, they all are in utter distress. Ask

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them what they want and do not go against their wishes. Do not hurt them."

Following his guru's advice, Shri Ram addressed his subjects, "My cherished people, what may I do to relieve you of your distress?"

They responded to him in one voice, "O Scion of the Raghus! If you trust that we adore you, if you really care for us, then allow us to follow the path you are taking. That is what all of us desire. It will be very kind of you to grant us our earnest prayer."

"Tatha-astu" – so be it!" said Raja Ram.

Shri Ram makes exceptions

Thus, says Maharishi Valmiki, not only human beings, but even his non-human devotees, were intent on following Shri Ram in his last journey. While granting them their wish, Ram made five exceptions – Raja Vibhishan, Hanuman, Jambvan, Maind and Dvivid. Of these, the first two – Vibhishan and Hanuman - are to live till *pralaya* – "dissolution of the world at the end of a *kalpa*" (Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary, p.663), and the other three – Jambvan, Maind and Dvivid – died during the time of Lord Krishna's incarnation.

To Vibhishan, the king of rakshasas, Shri Ram said –

Yavchchandrashch sooryashch yavt tishathati

medini/

Yavchch mtkatha loke tavad rajaym tvastivah//

"Till the sun and the moon exist, till the Earth exists, and till my tale is told, till such time your reign shall exist in this world."

\- Ibid/108/xxviii

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Ram also desired Vibhishan, his ally, to live in his body and worship the deities of the Ikshvakus such as Lord Jagannath and Lord Indra, et cetera.

To Hanuman he said, "You have decided to live on for a long time. Spread my sacred legend and roam about the world!"

The last journey begins

In this manner, the night ended and a new day dawned. Muni Vashisht performed with due sanctity all the sacred rituals for the solemn occasion. Then the procession was on its way. At its head walked Brahmins carrying the sacred fire. Shri Ram, clad in the finest clothing and carrying *kush* grass in both his hands, followed them, reciting the Vedic mantras. Behind him walked the rest of the congregation. He implored Lord Brahma to grant every one of the creatures following Him the Abode of *Santanak* – the world beyond the Brahm Lok according to the Sanatan cosmology.

They traversed a distance of one and a half yojan (about 12 kilometers) southwards to reach the Saryu River. The time had come. Lord Brahma and all the divinities had gathered to witness the phenomenal occurrence. As celestial music and fragrance filled the surroundings and divine beauties danced in jubilation, Shri Ram led the devout multitude to take a dip in the Saryu River. The following instant, every one of them, discarding their mortal coils, had attained divinity.

Thus, Shri Ram, having finished his round of the mortal world, reverted to His absolute form of Lord Vishnu.

(The author, a reputed writer and translator is presently based in Delhi.)

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ANCIENT TEMPLES OF JAMMU

Revisiting the region's rich heritage

Verender Bangroo

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is a paradise of natural beauty, boasting of breathtaking scenic spots, exquisite gardens, and majestic mountains. Beyond its stunning landscapes, the region is also rich in valuable monuments that reflect its rich cultural heritage and glorious past. Jammu, in particular, is renowned for its magnificent temples, showcasing a blend of ancient and modern sacred shrines that attract devotees and pilgrims from far and wide. These ancient temples serve as a testament to Jammu's glorious past, making the region a treasure trove of history, culture, and spirituality.

Ancient temples of Jammu: A showcase of Shikhara and Pahari styles

The ancient temples of Jammu are a testament to the region's rich cultural heritage, showcasing two distinct architectural styles: Shikhara also known as a Nagara style temple, and Pahari. These styles reflect the unique blend of artistic and cultural influences that have shaped the region's history.

The Shikhara style temples, exemplified by the temples

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at Kirmachi and Bhillawar, feature a characteristic design consisting of a cella, mandap, and porch. A spire crowns the cella, while the mandap is covered with a low pyramid-shaped roof. This style is a reflection of the region's ancient architectural traditions.

In contrast, the Pahari style temples, seen in the temples at Daddu, Basant Garh, and Gulabgarh, are characterized by timber-bonded stone walls and slanting roofs covered with shingles. These temples feature a vertical construction with a verandah on all four sides, serving as a circumambulatory path around the cella. The Pahari style is notable for its excellent craftsmanship in woodcarvings, with intricate patterns adorning ceilings, pillars, and brackets.

A common feature of these temples is the exquisite woodcarvings found on their ceilings, doorjambs, lintels, and windows. The carvings often depict planetary deities, known as Nav Grahas, which include Ravi (Sun), Soma (Moon), Mangala (Mars), Budha (Mercury), Brihaspati (Jupiter), Sukra (Venus), Shani (Saturn), Rahu (ascending node), and Ketu (descending node). The Raja Bask temple at Duddu is particularly notable for its ornate carvings, featuring images of Navgrahas, Lord Ganesh, Narsimha Avtara, and Dwarpals.

The ancient stone temples of Jammu, including those at Kirmachi, Bhillawar, Basohli, Sud Mahadev, Babor, and Ladan Kotli, are not only historically significant but also showcase the region's rich iconographical heritage. These temples demonstrate the excellence of local craftsmanship and are of absorbing interest to students of iconography.

Ancient stone temples of Jammu: A blend of architectural styles

The ancient stone temples of Jammu offer a fascinating glimpse

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into the evolution of iconographic features and architectural styles. These temples showcase a unique blend of Kashmiri and Himachali building styles, reflecting the cultural exchange and influences that have shaped the region's history. The temples also exhibit distinctive peculiarities in plan and elevation, highlighting the ingenuity of local architects.

In these temples, architecture and sculptures are intricately linked, demonstrating a harmonious balance between form and function. The gradual developments in architecture and engineering are evident in the construction of these temples, which showcase the skills and craftsmanship of local artisans.

Built of massive boulders and featuring intricate masonry work, these temples are indeed a marvel of ancient engineering. The use of large stones and precise construction techniques has ensured the durability and stability of these structures, allowing them to withstand the test of time.

The ancient stone temples of Jammu are not only remarkable architectural achievements but also hold significant cultural and historical importance. They provide valuable insights into the region's past, showcasing the artistic, cultural, and spiritual traditions that have shaped the region's identity.

Kirmachi: A hidden gem of ancient architecture

Located 64 kilometers from Jammu and 9 kilometers from Udhampur, Kirmachi village is a treasure trove of ancient architecture. Despite being relatively unknown, this village boasts of four elegant and imposing temples that showcase a unique blend of styles. Three of these temples stand in a row on the banks of the Devak River. Their construction is traditionally attributed to the Pandavas, although the exact date remains unknown. Some scholars believe King Kanishka founded this place.

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The temples of Kirmachi are remarkable for their blend of Pagoda and Gandhara styles, with a close resemblance to the Shikhara temples of Himachal Pradesh. The outer walls of the temples are adorned with intricate sculptured reliefs, while the main entrance of the larger temple features columns decorated with flowers, leaves, and miniature figures. The sculptures found in these temples, including the three-headed Shiva and Varah Avtara, demonstrate exceptional artistry.

The sculptured stones in these temples showcase the peak of sculpture art in ancient times. The intricate carvings and reliefs are a testament to the skill and craftsmanship of the artisans who created them. Despite being over a thousand years old, the temples of Kirmachi continue to stand the test of time, a lasting legacy of the region's rich cultural heritage.

The temples of Kirmachi share similarities with other ancient shrines in the Shikara style, such as those found at Masrur, Bajnath, Bajoura, and Bharmour. These temples are a significant part of the region's architectural and cultural heritage, offering valuable insights into the history and traditions of the area.

The Jalandara Devi temple: A neglected architectural marvel

Located in the picturesque village of Ladan Kotli near Udhampur is the Jalandara Devi Temple. Built in the Nagara style of architecture, this ancient temple is a remarkable example of medieval craftsmanship, featuring intricate stone carvings that depict various gods, goddesses, and mythological scenes.

The temple's architecture is a notable blend of North Indian and local styles, with a Shikhara-style spire that dominates the landscape. The outer walls of the temple are adorned with intricate carvings, showcasing scenes from mythology,

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including depictions of Lord Krishna, Lord Brahma, and Lord Indra. Its unique blend of North Indian and local styles, intricate stone carvings, and spiritual significance make it a remarkable example of medieval craftsmanship.

Bhillawar: A treasure trove of ancient history and architecture

Located 120 kilometers from Jammu, Bhillawar is a small town with a rich history dating back to ancient times. Mentioned in Kalhan's Rajtarangini, the chronology of kings, Bhillawar was known as Villapur in the past. During the reign of Raja Anant of Kashmir, King Kalsha ruled Villapur, and there were significant political and cultural relations between Kashmir and Bhillawar, including a royal marriage between Sussala, the ruler of Kashmir, and the daughter of Villapur's ruler.

Bhillawar is home to the ancient Hari Hara temple, built in the Shikara style, which is a testament to the region's architectural heritage. Standing 70 feet tall on a three-feet high platform, the temple features a Garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum) and a mandapa (assembly hall), although the latter has now fallen. The exterior spire of the temple above the Garbhagriha is ornamented with intricate carvings of lotus petals.

The temple's exterior walls are adorned with superb sculptures, including three-headed Vishnu, Lord Ganesha, and hand-folded Bhairava. The walls also feature carved figures of animals and mythical creatures, showcasing the artistic skills of the craftsmen who built the temple. Many sculptured stones are scattered around the temple, including a beautifully carved bull.

Bhillawar is a must-visit destination for anyone interested in history, architecture, and art. The Hari Hara temple is a significant cultural and historical landmark that showcases

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the region's rich heritage. Visitors can marvel at the intricate carvings, sculptures, and architectural style of the temple, which is a testament to the region's glorious past.

Basohli: A haven of art and architecture

Located about 123 kilometers from Jammu, Basohli is a renowned town celebrated for its exquisite Basohli paintings. The Pal Dynasty, which ruled Basohli, was known for its patronage of art, fostering the development of Pahari art, which reached its pinnacle before the Dogra rule. This artistic legacy continues to inspire art lovers worldwide.

On the banks of the River Ravi stands a majestic Shiva temple, a testament to the region's spiritual heritage. Two rock-cut caves, also situated on the riverbank, feature intriguing sculptures. One cave houses a life-size image, while another contains a Shiva Linga and an idol of the Mother Goddess, highlighting the region's rich cultural and spiritual significance.

The Uma-Maheshwara image, recovered from Basohli and dating back to the 10th century AD, is a masterpiece of Pahari art. Now housed in the Dogra Art Gallery in Jammu, this sculpture depicts Lord Shiva seated on his bull, Nandi, with Goddess Uma on his left thigh. Shiva is adorned with an elaborate, richly embellished crown, showcasing the artistic finesse of the time.

Basohli's artistic and architectural heritage is a reflection of its rich cultural past. The town's unique blend of art, architecture, and spirituality makes it an attractive destination for tourists and art enthusiasts.

Sudh Mahadev: A sacred Hindu site

Sudh Mahadev is a revered Hindu site, mentioned in ancient texts such as the *Nilmata Purana, Markande Purana*, and *Mahabharata*. According to mythological belief, this is the

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sacred site where the marriage of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati took place. The site's sacred origin attracts Hindus from all over India, who visit here throughout the year. A festival is celebrated here every year in June, drawing large crowds of devotees.

Although ancient remains are not visible in or around Sudh Mahadev, the present temple is a notable example of Dogra construction. The temple's courtyard features a trident with an inscription in Brahmi script, which some scholars date back to the 2nd-3rd century AD. The temple also houses images of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati in one of its niches, further emphasizing its spiritual significance.

Sudh Mahadev holds significant historical and cultural importance, reflecting the region's rich heritage and traditions. The site's association with Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati makes it a sacred destination, while the ancient trident and Brahmi script inscription provide valuable insights into the region's past.

Babor: A treasure trove of ancient temples

Located about 45 kilometers from Jammu and 5 kilometers from Mansar, Babor is a small village with a rich history. Mentioned in Pandit Kalhan's *Rajtarangni* as Babapur, Babor has a significant past, with Raja Kirti of Babor having visited the court of Raja Kalsha, the King of Kashmir.

Located in the picturesque village of Manwal, formerly known as Babor or Babbapur, the Babor group of temples is a collection of five ancient temples that date back to the 10th and 11th centuries. These temples, including Devi Bhagwati, Dera Babor, Kala Dera-1, Kala Dera-2, and Nand Babor, are a testament to the region's rich cultural heritage and architectural prowess. Despite being partially ruined, these temples continue

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to fascinate tourists and archaeologists alike with their exquisite craftsmanship and intricate carvings.

The temples are built in the Nagara style, a distinctive feature of ancient Indian architecture. Each temple has a unique design, with features such as garbhagriha (sanctums), antaral (vestibule), and mandapa (hall). The Devi Bhagwati Temple, for example, boasts of a beautifully carved doorway with figures of Ganga and Yamuna on the doorjambs and Lord Ganesha at the center of the lintel. The intricate carvings on the temple walls depict various gods and goddesses, including Lord Vishnu, Shiva, Bhairav, and Ganesha.

The Dera Babor Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is another notable example of the region's architectural heritage. The temple features eight fluted columns with elephant head capitals, a distinctive feature of ancient Indian architecture. The temple's mandapa (hall) is survived by these columns, which add to the temple's grandeur. The Kala Dera-2 Temple, on the other hand, has a well-preserved lantern-type ceiling supported by fluted columns, making it a standout example of ancient Indian architectural expertise.

The Nand Babor Temple, a small temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, is unique in its design. The temple features many garbhagrihas (sanctums) attached to a common mandapa (hall), a feature that sets it apart from other temples in the region. The temple's eastern wall depicts a miniature temple with a curvilinear Shikhara, adding to its ornate design.

The temples at Babor are a testament to the region's rich cultural heritage, showcasing the artistic and architectural skills of the time. These ancient structures provide valuable insights into the history and traditions of the region, making Babor an important destination for those interested in history, art, and culture.

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Bahu Fort and Mahakali temple

The Bahu Fort, situated on the left bank of the River Tawi in Jammu, is one of the most famous forts in the region. Within the fort's premises lies a revered Mahakali temple, built on a 4-feet high platform and made of white marble. While some scholars believe the temple dates back to the 8th-9th century, the construction above the plinth appears to be of more modern origin.

The Mahakali temple is an important cultural and spiritual site, attracting devotees and visitors alike. The fort's strategic location on the River Tawi adds to its historical significance, making it a notable landmark in Jammu's rich cultural heritage.

Epilogue: Unveiling the cultural significance of Jammu's ancient temples

As we reflect on the history of Jammu's ancient temples, it becomes evident that these places of worship were not only spiritual centers but also hubs of educational and political activities. The temples of Jammu, spanning centuries, stand as testaments to the region's rich cultural heritage and are exemplary specimens of art and architecture.

Jammu's strategic location, linking the plains to the higher Himalayas, facilitated a unique blend of artistic and architectural styles. The Shivalik belt of Jammu nurtured this blend, resulting in a distinct style that journeyed through the Himalayas, influencing the temple architecture of North India, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and even Nepal.

It is better to study the geo-cultural habitats rather than political or administrative boundaries to gain a deeper understanding of the region's cultural evolution. This approach allows us to appreciate the nuances of cultural exchange and the evolution of artistic styles.

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The monuments and relics of the past, in terms of art and architecture, captivate everyone who observes them. It is essential to preserve these ancient monuments, not only for their historical significance but also for their ability to inspire future generations. By protecting our cultural heritage, we can proudly proclaim that our past was great and illuminating.

The call of the time is clear: we must make concerted efforts to preserve our ancient monuments. This requires a collective effort from government, local communities, and individuals to ensure the protection and conservation of these cultural treasures. By doing so, we can ensure that the rich cultural heritage of Jammu and the surrounding regions continues to inspire and educate future generations.

(The author, an artist, museologist, photographer, writer and poet, has been the Director of the regional Centres of Indira Gandhi National Centre for Art (IGNCA), J&K and Goa.)

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THE RAGUNATH TEMPLE

A personal journey

Heena Mahajan

Long before I understood the meaning of faith, I lived it—just across the street from one of North India's most iconic temples — The Raghunath Temple.

Introduction

Raghunath Temple wasn't a destination; it was a part of our daily rhythm. While pilgrims and foreigners waited in long queues to witness its grandeur, for us, it was simply across the lane—a sacred constant in the ordinary.

Sometimes we visited in the serene hush of early mornings, sometimes under the golden blush of evenings. We'd pause at the entrance, touch the earth in reverence, and step into a world filled with incense, chants, and stories that shaped our childhood.

What stood before us wasn't just Jammu's crown jewel—it was a living tapestry of devotion, Dogra identity, and timeless architecture. This is not just a tale of stone and scripture; it is a journey through memory, faith, and the temple that quietly raised us.

The air around the Raghunath Temple smelled of incense,

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ancient bricks, and devotion. Every time we stepped through the long passage with the shoe keeper's rooms on either side, choosing which side to leave our slippers became a game between us kids. But what waited inside was no child's play—it was a divine experience.

The living library of Dharma

As we entered, we came across a humble yet profoundly dignified structure—the temple library. Within its quiet walls rested thousands of ancient manuscripts in Sanskrit, Persian, and Dogri, each one echoing the timeless wisdom of the Vedas, Puranas, and Shastras. Among its most prized possessions were rare birch bark manuscripts—fragile yet fierce carriers of knowledge—covering subjects from grammar and music to drama, philosophy, and sacred scriptures.

It was Maharaja Ranbir Singh who envisioned this treasure trove, establishing not just a library but also a translation center within the temple complex. Here, Arabic and Persian texts were meticulously translated into Sanskrit—a rare and powerful gesture aimed at fostering religious harmony, widely praised by scholars of that time.

Even today, the Shri Raghunath Temple stands as a proud custodian of the ancient Sharada script and holds one of the richest collections of Hindu-Buddhist texts in the region. In keeping with the times, the temple has also launched the "E-Gangotri" initiative—digitally preserving manuscripts to safeguard India's intellectual and spiritual legacy for generations to come.

I remember my grandfather always stopping at the doorway of this library. He would gently bow his head, eyes filled with reverence. "This," he would whisper, "is our real treasure."

Mirroring the cosmos

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Raghunath Temple isn't just a shrine—it is a sprawling complex of seven connected temples. Inspired by Mughal and Hindu architectural elements, each temple in the complex features a unique blend of domes, arches, and spires. The gold-plated shikharas stand out against the sky like prayers cast in metal.

An architectural canvas

Built without steel, the temple's three- to four-foot thick walls maintain a naturally cool climate. Traditional materials like lime mortar, clay, and straw form the very soul of its construction, gaining strength over centuries. Its octagonal raised platform, spiral towers, fish motifs on columns, and massive wooden doors resonate with the craftsmanship of Jammu's royal courts and Mubarak Mandi Palace.

The temple also embodies the Vedic worldview through its four Parikramas (circumambulatory paths), each representing cosmic circles of dharma (righteousness), artha (purpose), kama (desire), moksha (liberation), and karma (action). As you walk these circuits, you pass shrines of Lord Vishnu, Krishna-Radha, Narsingh, Varaha, Vamana, Shiva, and even the sacred representations of the Chaar Dhams—Badrinath, Dwarka, Jagannath Puri, and Rameshwaram.

Through the *Deodis*

As we stepped through the main gateway, we entered a sun-drenched courtyard embraced by soaring, gold-plated shikharas that seemed to touch the sky. Towering above the entrance was the radiant emblem of Surya, the Sun God—an unmistakable mark of the Dogra dynasty's proud Suryavanshi lineage. This marked the first Deodi, a sacred threshold that signified both transition and reverence.

Two more Deodis lay ahead, each narrower, more intimate, and holier than the last—inviting us deeper into the sanctum.

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With every step forward, the surroundings grew quieter. The air thickened with the scent of burning incense and the stillness of devotion. By the time we reached the innermost sanctum, it felt as though time itself had paused in prayer.

The main entrance façade of the Raghunath Temple is a marvel of symbolic design. Seated at the very top is Lord Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, flanked by four majestic elephants perched on an arch shaped like a grand bow—perhaps an artistic echo of Lord Rama's legendary bow. Just below this sits a beautifully carved Sun symbol, adorned with intricate detailing, followed by another arch in the shape of a bow. Supporting all of this is the grand main entrance, upheld by massive, double-height columns, giving the structure a regal, timeless strength.

Today, parts of this entrance are obscured by modern bunkers, added for security. At the base of the columns, one can still spot the remains of fish-shaped carvings—once proud, now mostly eroded, whispering stories of a more artistically alive past.

The sanctum of divinity

At the heart of the Raghunath Temple lies its innermost sanctum, resplendent in gold and steeped in silence. Here, the principal deities—Lord Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana—stand in divine harmony, drawing countless devotees into a moment of spiritual stillness.

What makes this sanctum truly exceptional is the idol of Lord Rama, crafted not in the usual marble or metal, but in rare granite—depicting him in his Shyamvarn (dusky) form, symbolizing his divine identity as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The golden walls surrounding the deities shimmer like a reflection of the cosmic order, magnifying the sanctity of this sacred chamber.

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After offering their prayers here, devotees begin their Parikrama (ritual circumambulation) around the sanctum. Along this path stand the statues representing the four directions (Dishas), Agni Devta (God of Fire), Shani Devta (Saturn), and the two gatekeepers, Jai and Vijay, symbolizing divine protection.

Inside the temple complex are also separate idols of Lord Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana—distinct from those in the sanctum—as well as Radha and Krishna. These idols are ceremonially worshipped and placed on a beautifully adorned chariot during major festivals like Ram Navami, Vijayadashami, and Krishna Janmashtami, continuing the royal tradition of devotion established by the Dogra rulers.

Blessings received

After completing the Parikrama around the inner sanctum, devotees approach a peaceful corner where a pujari, seated with composed grace, continues the sacred ritual of blessings. He begins by applying a tilak on the forehead—made from roli (vermilion) or sandalwood paste—a spiritual mark that symbolizes protection, purity, and the presence of the divine.

Next, he ties the Raksha Sutra, a sacred red thread known locally as khamni (sacred red thread), around your wrist. This thread isn't just ornamental; it's a spiritual bond—invoking divine protection, warding off negativity, and serving as a reminder of one's devotion and moral conduct.

Only after these rituals, the pujari offers the Charnamrit—holy water infused with Tulsi leaves, which devotees sip and then touch to their head and heart, accepting it as a sacred mark of purity and grace.

Finally, he offers Prasad—a divine blessing in the form of white makhana (foxnuts), fruits, and sweets. Humble in appearance, yet sacred in essence, this offering carries the sanctity of the

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temple and the blessings of the deities—shared equally with every devotee, regardless of status.

Echoes of devotion

As we step out from the innermost sanctum, having bowed before the deities and received blessings, a sense of serene completeness washes over us. On either side of the path leading out, we notice open spaces, often overlooked in hurried visits—but deeply significant.

Here, one finds dharis (mats) neatly rolled or spread out, along with traditional musical instruments like dhols, shena, and manjeeras, resting quietly until the air comes alive again. These corners serve as sacred stages where morning and evening Satsangs are held—devotional gatherings filled with music, prayer, and shared emotion.

Most often, it is the local women, draped in traditional attire, who lead these soul-stirring sessions. Their voices rise in unison—soft yet powerful—filling the temple with bhajans and kirtans that echo through the halls and into the hearts of those present. The rhythm of the dhol, the wail of the shehnai, and the hum of devotion create a spiritual atmosphere that lingers long after the music stops. It's not just a ritual—it's a daily celebration of faith, community, and continuity, passed down through generations.

The journey through the Raghunath Temple unfolds in layers, each Parikrama (circumambulatory path) revealing deeper spiritual and architectural richness.

After the first inner Parikrama around the sanctum, devotees step into the second Parikrama, which encompasses intricately built Ahatas—open courtyards framed with arched entrances and inbuilt ventilators, thoughtfully designed to allow natural light and air to flow. These features enable worshippers to sit,

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meditate, and pray in comfort. The wide verandas and expansive corridors ensure a smooth flow of devotees, making the temple remarkably resilient to crowd-related chaos or stampedes, even during peak festivals.

The second Parikrama

The true spiritual heart of this Parikrama lies within a small, dark chamber, illuminated only by natural light filtering through roshandaans (high skylight-vents)—high-placed skylight-ventilators that softly guide your path as you move through the ritual circuit.

Within this tranquil space, the temple safeguards over 12.25 lakh (1.225 million) Shaligram stones, each a fossilized relic from the Gandaki River near Muktinath in Nepal. In Hindu tradition, these sacred stones are revered as living embodiments of Lord Vishnu and are believed to collectively symbolize 33 crore (330 million) deities—including Prajapati, Indra, the 8 Vasus, 12 Adityas, and 11 Rudras. Steeped in myth and spiritual energy, these stones form a cosmic gathering under one roof.

Worshipped each day with profound devotion, the Shaligrams link the temple's rituals to the vast cosmic order of Sanatan Dharma. Devotees who enter this chamber describe a powerful sensation: "as if standing in the presence of the universe itself," surrounded by countless divine energies.

Here, the chamber's architectural simplicity reinforces its spiritual power. The absence of artificial lights, reliance on ambient daylight through roshandaans (high skylight-vents), and the silent circle of the Parikrama path amplify the sanctity of the space. As you enter on one side and emerge through the other, the ritual walk becomes a meditative journey—moving through sacred energy, architectural elegance, and centuries of devotion woven into each step.

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The third Parikrama

The third Parikrama is a magnificent circle of devotion—featuring 14 beautifully crafted shrines, each dedicated to various deities. Among them are Lord Vishnu, Lord Ganesha, Bharat, Shatrughna, Narasimha Avatar, Radha-Krishna, Varaha Avatar, Vaman Avatar, Mahalaxmi, Matsya, Kashyap Ji, Virat Ji, Lord Shiva, and Lakshmi Narayan. A dedicated hall along this path also artistically represents the Char Dham (Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri, and Rameswaram), centered around Lord Brahma, symbolizing the completeness of the Hindu spiritual journey.

Though the temple was officially completed in 1860 under Maharaja Ranbir Singh's reign, it continues to evolve. In more recent years, new additions have reflected changing devotional landscapes. Idols of Mata Vaishno Devi, Hanuman, Nataraja, and most recently Sai Baba have found their sacred space within the temple premises.

The sacred well

At the back of the temple stands an old underground well, known locally as a Boli (stepped underground well). It is not a regular round well but a rectangular one with stairs going down, and it is covered with an iron door. Long ago, this well was used for drinking and washing water by the temple priests and visitors.

Today, even though modern water supply systems have taken over, this well is still a part of the Parikrama path. It is not used every day, but during special Dogri rituals and local festivals—like Bash Dua, Drubdi, and Kharkhe—water from this well is taken out and used with great respect.

As children, we were always curious about the well, but our elders would warn us not to go near it. They told us stories about

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a crocodile living inside, which was their clever way to keep us safe. These stories filled our hearts with wonder and mystery. The well became more than just a source of water—it became a part of the temple's charm and our childhood memories.

The outermost fourth Parikrama

In the outermost Parikrama, a transparent Shivling, brought and installed by Dr. Karan Singh, now holds a place of reverence. Painted nearby on the wall is a soul-stirring Dogri Aarti, also penned by Dr. Karan Singh—a lyrical offering that encapsulates the spiritual identity and cultural pride of Jammu, the City of Temples.

At the conclusion of this sacred journey, near the main entrance, stand statues of Maharaja Gulab Singh, Maharaja Ranbir Singh, and Maharaja Amar Singh—eternal sentinels of this legacy, reminding all who visit of the deep royal patronage and historical devotion that have shaped this divine edifice.

Jammu: Land of Suryavanshis and sacred legends

Our visits to Raghunath Temple were never just about prayers—they were also moments of connection, of stories passed down like family heirlooms. As the sun dipped behind the shikharas and the temple bells echoed through the evening air, our grandparents would begin their gentle storytelling, voices filled with pride and reverence.

They always spoke of Maharaja Gulab Singh and Maharaja Ranbir Singh—not just as kings, but as visionaries who gave the city its spiritual soul. And before their names, always came the legend of Raja Jambu Lochan, the founder of Jammu.

According to the tale, Jambu Lochan once witnessed a scene so peaceful that it changed the course of history—a lion and a goat drinking water side by side at the bank of a river, without fear or aggression. That river was the sacred Tawi, which still

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flows through the heart of Jammu. For the king, this was a sign from the heavens—a symbol of harmony, and a message that this land was destined to be holy. He decided to build a city at that very spot, giving it his own name: Jammu.

It was in this spiritually rich land that the Dogra rulers built their legacy. In 1835, Maharaja Gulab Singh, the first Dogra ruler of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, laid the foundation of the grand Raghunath Temple. His dream wasn't just of a temple—it was of a sacred space where devotion, knowledge, and culture could live together. That dream was carried forward by his son, Maharaja Ranbir Singh, who completed the temple in 1860, adding to it a library, a translation centre, and a treasure trove of manuscripts in Sanskrit, Persian, and Dogri.

Listening to these stories as children, we didn't always understand the full depth of their history—but we could feel their weight. The pride in our grandparents' voices, the glow in their eyes as they spoke—it made us realise that we weren't just visitors to a temple; we were part of a much older story.

Open garden

Nestled within the sacred walls of Shri Raghunath Temple, a serene open garden adds to the temple's charm and calm. This peaceful green space offers a quiet corner for reflection, rest, and meditation, shaded by tall, old trees that seem to whisper stories of the past.

For children, the garden becomes a gentle playground—dotted with lion-shaped stone sculptures, carved long ago to symbolize strength and protectiveness. These playful carvings were thoughtfully placed not only to preserve the traditional value of the gardens but also to spark curiosity and joy among younger visitors.

While the temple is known for its grand shrines, detailed

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architecture, and the presence of idols from across the Hindu pantheon, this open garden stands out as a space where the spiritual meets the everyday. Here, families pause, elders rest, and children play—all within the sacred embrace of one of Jammu's most treasured temples.

The blessed exit

After completing our darshan, we retraced our steps, stopping once more at the shoe keeper's stand. He would greet us with a quiet, knowing smile—handing back our shoes as if returning us to the world, somehow changed.

Just before stepping outside the temple, we would bend down once again to touch the ground, placing our foreheads gently on the earth. A final act of surrender. A silent thank you to the divine.

A temple scarred

On March 30, 2002, terror struck the Raghunath Temple when two suicide bombers launched an attack, killing 11 people, including brave security personnel, and injuring nearly 20 others. Just months later, on November 24, the temple faced another assault—terrorists armed with grenades stormed the premises, taking the lives of 14 innocent worshippers and leaving around 45 wounded.

And yet, amid the smoke and chaos, the idols of Lord Rama and Sita remained untouched—a symbol of divine protection and unshaken faith.

Today, the temple stands vigilant. Metal detectors, scanners, armed guards, and a strict no-phone policy guard its gates. But behind these layers of security, the soul of the temple remains pure and unbroken—its sanctity intact, its spiritual light shining undimmed.

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Raghunath Temple today

Today, Raghunath Temple is not merely a destination of pilgrimage. It is a cradle of Dogra identity, a vault of ancient wisdom, and a monument to resilience. It holds centuries of art, philosophy, and living faith.

But for me, it is also the memory of warm hands guiding mine, of incense blending with winter air, of Pandit ji's calm voice echoing under the dome, and of stories that made a child believe the divine lives not in heaven, but just across the street.

And that is why Raghunath Temple will forever remain, not just a monument in Jammu, but the temple of my soul.

(The author, a noted writer, is based in Jammu.)

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FRANZ KAFKA

A conscience beyond time

Dr Rafeeq Masoodi

Franz Kafka, that strange and luminous figure of twentieth-century literature, continues to live in the imagination of humanity long after his frail body was consigned to the grave in 1924. He was a man who never saw himself as a genious, who doubted his own worth, who requested that his writings be destroyed after his death, and yet today he stands like a towering presence across the vast landscape of world literature. Kafka was not just a novelist or a storyteller; he was a revealer of truths hidden beneath the skin of modern existence. To read him is to feel the pulse of absurdity and alienation, to recognize in his parables the very shape of our fractured lives. I had always known Kafka through his works and through the voices of critics who regarded him as the master of the absurd, the poet of alienation, the philosopher of estrangement. But when, this summer, I walked into the quiet Jewish Cemetery of Prague and stood before his tombstone, a strange silence took hold of me. I felt as if all his words, all his restless anxieties, all his fragile dreams had condensed into that small piece of earth where he lay. The stone bore his name without extravagance, yet in its humility it radiated an aura of immense power. At that moment, the frail man who had once scribbled through nights

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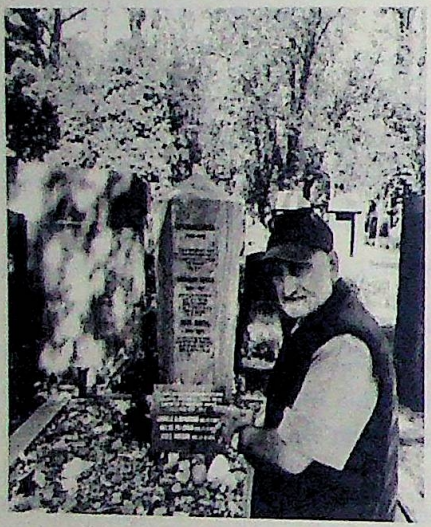
of insomnia seemed not dead but alive in the whispers of the wind that moved through the cemetery.

It is difficult to think of Kafka outside his contradictions. He was born in 1883 into a German-speaking Jewish family in Prague,



a city then under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where cultures overlapped but seldom merged. He belonged to a minority within a minority, doubly estranged, carrying within him the burden of an identity never at ease with itself. His father, Hermann Kafka, was a man of robust will and practical energy, a successful businessman who believed in worldly achievement and masculine authority. Franz, on the other hand, was fragile, contemplative, burdened by ill health and self-doubt. Their relationship was scarred by conflict, distance, and unspoken wounds. In his famous Letter to His Father, Kafka poured out his sense of smallness before this towering paternal figure whose loud voice, he confessed, could silence him into nothingness. This unbridgeable gap between father and son was not merely a private wound; it became a metaphor for the human condition that runs through his writings: the individual dwarfed before incomprehensible authority, the self lost before faceless power.

His life was not free from tenderness, but even love arrived for him shrouded in hesitations and anxieties. His relationships with women, notably with Felice Bauer and later with Dora

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Diamant, reflected his yearning for intimacy as well as his inability to reconcile personal ties with the inner compulsion of his writing. His engagement with Felice ended in painful dissolution, haunted by his doubts and fears. With Dora, who remained with him until the end, he found a measure of peace, yet his battle with tuberculosis had already written its verdict. The man who feared commitment, who feared the ordinary responsibilities of family life, perhaps understood that his true marriage was with literature itself. Writing was his breath, his means of survival, the only way he could confront the absurdity of existence.

Yet Kafka was no professional writer in the usual sense. By day he worked in an insurance office, carefully fulfilling his duties as a bureaucrat; by night he wrestled with sentences that would one day shake the literary world. His life, outwardly uneventful, was a battlefield of the soul. Out of that battle emerged some of the most profound works of modern literature. The Metamorphosis, written in 1915, remains one of the most startling allegories of modern alienation. Gregor Samsa,

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transformed overnight into a monstrous insect, embodies the terrifying logic of a world where humanity is measured only by utility. Once he is no longer useful to his family, he becomes an object of shame and disposal. The story is grotesque and surreal, but it is also piercingly real, for it reveals the brutal way societies discard those who cannot conform to their demands.

His unfinished novels—The Trial, The Castle, and Amerika—stand as monuments of the modern condition. The Trial follows Josef K., a man suddenly arrested and tried by a mysterious court whose reasons remain inaccessible. The novel is not just about law; it is about the faceless machinery of power that governs modern existence. It is about the terror of being accused without knowing the crime, of struggling within systems that are impenetrable and absurd. The Castle depicts a land surveyor endlessly trying to gain access to the Castle and its authorities, a metaphor for the futile human quest for acceptance, meaning, or grace in a world where power remains unreachable. Amerika, sometimes called The Man Who Disappeared, examines exile, estrangement, and the farcical dislocations of modern identity. Each novel, though left incomplete, carries an intensity that makes its incompleteness itself part of the message—life itself is unfinished, our search for meaning forever suspended.

Kafka's short stories, such as In the Penal Colony, A Hunger Artist, and A Country Doctor, reveal his uncanny gift for combining the dreamlike with the brutally real. His style was not ornamented; his sentences were often plain, precise, even bureaucratic in tone, yet through this very simplicity he conjured landscapes of allegory. Reading him, one often feels trapped in a dream where logic operates with nightmarish clarity. His world is full of doors that never open, trials without cause, transformations without explanation. Yet beneath the strangeness lies a profound commentary on the dehumanizing effects of modernity, on the alienation of man in a world of

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machines, institutions, and endless paper.

The legacy of Kafka goes far beyond the boundaries of literature. The very word "Kafkaesque" has entered our vocabulary to describe the absurd, nightmarish, and incomprehensible situations that define so much of contemporary life. Bureaucratic mazes, faceless institutions, laws that entangle rather than liberate, the suffocating sensation of being reduced to a number in a system—all this is Kafkaesque. His influence can be seen in writers across continents: in Camus, who saw in Kafka a prophet of the absurd; in Sartre, who read him as a precursor of existentialist thought; in Borges, who admired his metaphysical imagination; in Márquez and Murakami, who absorbed his surreal logic into their magical worlds. Even beyond literature, Kafka has left his imprint on philosophy, psychoanalysis, theology, and political thought. Some interpret him as a mystic struggling with the silence of God, others as a prophet who foresaw the rise of totalitarianism, still others as a psychologist of the subconscious fears that modernity breeds. Each generation returns to him and discovers anew that his works are inexhaustible mirrors reflecting different facets of human anxiety.

For me, however, Kafka became real not just in books but in that cemetery in Prague (Now called Praha). To stand before his grave was to feel both humility and awe. I wrote there only a note in Kashmiri, my mother tongue. I placed it on his grave and felt as though

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a bridge had been built across time and geography. The man who wrote in German, who lived in Praha, Prague a century ago, seemed to belong to my land, to my people as much as to Europe. Kafka's alienation was not only his own; it became universal. His anxieties became ours. His parables spoke in a language beyond language, crossing borders and centuries to touch the collective soul of humanity.

My journey through Prague ,Praha, led me also to Café Louvre, where Kafka is believed to have written some of his works. The café, with its high ceilings, old-world charm, and literary aura, seemed to breathe with history. I imagined Kafka sitting in a corner, scribbling notes late into the night, perhaps pausing to sip coffee, perhaps looking around with his inward, restless eyes. The walls of such places become silent witnesses to creation, holding the echoes of conversations, the birth of ideas that one day shake the world. Café Louvre was frequented not only by Kafka but also by Einstein and Rilke; it was a crucible where thought and art mingled freely. Being there reminded me how creativity thrives in the ordinary spaces of life, how genius does not descend in splendid palaces but is born in the humble corners of cafés, in the sleepless hours of night, in the solitary struggle of pen against paper.

As I reflected on Kafka's presence in our world today, I realized his relevance has only intensified. In our age of faceless algorithms making decisions about our lives, the Kafkaesque has not remained confined to literature—it has become the very texture of our lives. Every time one is lost in endless paperwork, every time one feels reduced to data, every time truth becomes inaccessible, one is living in Kafka's universe. He is the writer who predicted not only the twentieth century but also the twenty-first.

And yet, Kafka does not merely leave us in despair. His

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greatness lies in the way he compels us to recognize absurdity, to confront our estrangement, to wrestle with questions of meaning. He never gave answers, for perhaps there are none, but he gave us images and parables that continue to disturb us into awareness. His stories awaken us from complacency. They whisper: this is the truth of your condition, do not turn away. In this sense Kafka is not a pessimist but a moral awakener, a man who turned his own anxieties into universal parables so that humanity might see itself more clearly.

As I departed from Prague, now known as Praha, carrying with me the silence of his grave and the hum of Café Louvre, I thought of his brief life—forty years only. A man who doubted himself, who feared his father, who longed for love but fled from its responsibilities, who worked in an insurance office by day and wrote in sleepless nights. And yet this fragile life created an earthquake in literature, an impact that continues to reverberate across the world. If forty years were enough to produce such a seismic shift, what would another forty have brought? Perhaps whole new continents of literature, perhaps a complete transformation of modern criticism and philosophy. Yet perhaps the brevity of his life itself was necessary, for it compressed into that short span an intensity that has made him eternal.

Kafka remains with us not in monuments or ceremonies but in the living fiber of literature, in the anxieties of modern man, in the questions that disturb us still. He belongs as much to Prague as to every city where alienation resides, as much to German literature as to Kashmiri sensibility, as much to the past as to the future. When I wrote in Kashmiri on his grave, I felt I was not only offering homage but also claiming kinship—our sorrows, our estrangements, our search for meaning are the same. Kafka lives wherever the human soul wrestles with the absurd, wherever man feels small, wherever the search for

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meaning continues against the silence of the universe. His name endures, not as an ornament of literary history, but as a living conscience. May his words never cease to trouble, awaken, and inspire humanity.

(The author is a former Secretary of J&K Academy of Art, Culture & Languages, and former ADG Doordarshan.)

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AUSPICIOUS AND INAUSPICIOUS IN GUJJAR TRADITION OF J&K

Dr Javaid Rahi

Auspiciousness and inauspiciousness entail ways of organising what is inherently disorderly; that is, life events through time. Auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are readings of the world which provide a way of interpreting and dealing with contingent, uncertain events and allow the possibility of purposeful human intervention to influence their outcome. (H.Lambert)

In Gojri-the language of Gujjars-Bakerwals, the word for "auspicious" is Saras or Salkhano, while "inauspicious" is referred to as Nehas or Nakhater. Among the Gujjar-Bakerwal tribal communities of Jammu and Kashmir, these concepts hold deep cultural and spiritual significance. Various customs and beliefs are associated with determining whether a time, act, or omen is Saras or Nehas. For instance, before beginning important tasks such as marriages, shifting to seasonal dhoks (pastures), or purchasing livestock, elders consult traditional signs or seek the guidance of a religious or spiritual elder to ensure the timing is Saras. Observing natural signs—like the movement of birds, sneezing, or dreams—is also a common practice to determine favorable or unfavorable outcomes.The auspiciousness and inauspiciousness practices

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among the community are as under :

Animals : Auspicious and inauspicious

Animals are not only a source of livelihood but also hold importance in tribal society. Among the Gujjars, specific physical traits in animals (especially in buffaloes/cows) are considered auspicious, believed to bring prosperity, growth, and luck to their owners.

Panj Kalayan

The term 'Panj Kalayan' refers to buffaloes/ cows that possess five distinctive white markings, making them highly revered in Gujjar traditions. These five signs are:

White-Colored Feet – Symbolizing stability and strength, such buffaloes are believed to bring economic prosperity in favour of owner.

White Tail –Such mark is believed to bring good fortune to the owner.

White Forehead with a Half-Moon Marking – A sacred symbol associated with divine blessings and protection against evil.

White Muzzle (Nose) – A sign of fertility and milk production.

White Mark on the Back –an indication of longevity and overall well-being for the owner.

Animals possessing these attributes are often chosen for ceremonial purposes, including gifting on weddings and other auspicious occasions.

Inauspicious signs in buffaloes

Some buffaloes are seen as harbingers of fortune, others are considered inauspicious due to specific physical and behavioral traits. These signs include:

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Tilted belly towards the left – Believed to bring misfortune and financial instability to the owner.

Downward-turning horns – Thought to be an ill omen, as it symbolizes declining prosperity.

Unhygienic eating habits – Buffaloes that consume plastic, human stool, or other unnatural substances are considered impure and unfit for domestic keeping. Such habits are associated with diseases and negative energy in the household.

Other auspicious and inauspicious animals

1. The red , pure white and black and white horses symbolize strength, progress, and are considered auspicious for the owner.
2. The red bull is considered auspicious.
3. The red and white cambo cow is considered auspicious among Gujjars.
4. The black camel is considered inauspicious.
5. If a horse has a circular mark on its forehead, it is considered inauspicious (Nehas), believed to bring misfortune or danger to the owner.
6. A horse with only three white-coloured feet is viewed as a sign of instability and bad luck, and is therefore considered inauspicious.
7. Horses with tilted or non-smooth tails are also viewed as inauspicious, symbolizing misalignment or bad omens in tribal folklore.
8. A goat with one ear folded (locally called *Buchi*) is thought to be Nehas, and may be avoided during purchases or rituals.
9. A goat lacking lower teeth is another sign of inauspiciousness.

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10. If a buffalo gives birth during the Bikrami calendar month of *Poh* (the tenth month, typically mid-December to mid-January), it is considered inauspicious.

Inauspicious voices

Donkey's alarming voice

Cats/dogs weeping: The unusual weeping or crying of cats and dogs is traditionally linked with misfortune and impending tragedy. Such occurrences are taken seriously and often lead to prayers and protective rituals.

Unusual activity of animals: If all animals in an area exhibit signs of distress—such as restlessness, stamping the ground, show erratic movements—it is believed to be an indication of an impending earthquake, flooding, landslides or natural disaster in the area. This observation has been a crucial early warning system for the community living in mountainous and seismic regions.

Auspicious and inauspicious birds

Birds play a significant role in determining the favorability of times for rituals and daily activities among the tribal Gujjars -Bakerwals. Each bird species is associated with specific meanings and is carefully observed.

Auspicious birds

Koyal / Kuku, Cuckoos and Doves are considered as auspicious birds. Their melodious voices are viewed as blessings, signalling happiness and good fortune.

Pigeon is considered a symbol of prosperity and its presence in the area are highly regarded.

Inauspicious birds

1. **Owl:** The hoot of an owl or many owls is believed to be a message of misfortune, illness, or even death in the

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area. It is particularly feared if an unusual hoot of an owl is heard during the day or night before an important event.

2. **Crow**: The cawing of crows on left side of the home of the owner or during significant events is often seen as a warning of potential trouble.
3. **Bat:** Bats are often associated with darkness, and their presence in an area is considered a sign of bad luck.

Auspicious and inauspicious timing

Based on traditional wisdom passed down through generations, certain days are considered slow, inauspicious, or highly favorable for particular activities. Some are as follows:

Friday (Jumma)

Friday, or "Jumma," though holds great religious significance and is primarily dedicated to prayers and spiritual gatherings, the Gujjars consider it a "slow day" (Thando Bar) for initiating new work. It is believed that any task begun on this day will take a prolonged period to reach completion. For example , if it starts raining on a Friday, the rain is expected to last for eight days. Despite this, weddings and prayer ceremonies are often scheduled on Fridays to seek divine blessings.

The belief surrounding "Auspicious Friday" holds special significance in Gujjars that if a person passes away on a Friday, it is a sign of their honesty, piety, and righteousness. Many believe that such an individual is blessed by God and will not face punishment in the afterlife.

According to this belief, the Angels of Judgment, who are appointed by God to examine a person's deeds after death inside the grave, are at rest on Fridays. As a result, the deceased is thought to be spared from questioning and trials in the grave. It is also believed that the person will enter paradise without any questioning *(Puchh)*, as the doors of divine mercy are wide

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open on this sacred day.

In the community, a person who dies on a Friday is highly respected and often referred to as a man of God. Family and friends express satisfaction for such a departure, believing it to be a sign of divine favour.

Auspicious days

Thursday (Soul Day)

Among the Gujjar and Bakerwal people, Thursday, known as *Beerwar* in Gojri language, holds a special significance. Be it the construction of a house, marriage ceremonies, seasonal migration, or other major events, the tribals prefer to commence these activities on a Thursday, believing that it brings good fortune, and divine blessings.

The day is associated with their departed ancestors, believing that the souls of their forefathers and other deceased family members return to their homes on this sacred day. And to honour their ancestors, Gujjars and Bakerwals prepare special meals and offer food after offering Prayers *(Darudh)* as a mark of respect and remembrance. Families prepare simple but special meals and a minor part of that food is placed outside their homes preferably on rooftop symbolizing their offerings to the departed souls.They believes that their soul will come and eat the same. With this they seek the blessings of their forefathers and ensure peace and prosperity in their households.

Thursday is considered the most favorable day to start any new work, whether it is the construction of a house, agricultural activities, or setting out on long journeys. Many Gujjar families schedule weddings, engagements, and other joyful events on a Thursday.

The nomadic Gujjars- Bakerwals, who migrate between summer and winter pastures, often begin their journeys on a Thursday,

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believing it will lead to a safe and successful migration.

Thus, Thursday stands as a symbol of hope, tradition, and reverence in the lives of the Gujjar and Bakerwal people, making it the most esteemed day of the week.

Sunday and Monday

Sunday and Monday are widely regarded as auspicious days for beginning new endeavors. Whether starting a business, initiating a journey, or planning a major event, these days are believed to bring prosperity and success.

For tribals, the days of the week reflect their deep connection to faith and ancestral wisdom. These customs continue to guide their daily lives, ensuring that their actions align with time-honored traditions that promise success, protection, and blessings.

Inauspicious days

Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday

Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday are considered as inauspicious for starting new ventures. Traditional wisdom warns that initiating work on these days is unlikely to lead to success. There is also a belief that if a war begins on a Tuesday or Wednesday, it will end in failure. Travel, particularly toward the east, is avoided on these days. A popular Gojri saying reflects this belief:

"Manglar te Budwar-Jiti Baji Samjho Har"

(Translation: "If a war started on Tuesday or Wednesday, consider the same already lost.")

Auspicious and inauspicious time

The time of the day plays a crucial role in determining the outcome of various activities. Many cultures, including the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir, have a number of beliefs

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regarding auspicious and inauspicious times for different tasks. These beliefs are often based on traditional wisdom, spiritual perspectives, and observations of natural cycles.

Auspicious time

Morning hours: The early hours of the day are considered ideal for starting journeys, prayers, and new ventures. The freshness of the morning is linked to purity, clarity of thought, and success. It is believed that the energy at this time is positive, making it suitable for beginning important tasks.

Inauspicious times

Midday: Midday, when the sun is at its peak, is traditionally not preferred for starting new projects or rituals. It is believed that this time brings distruction (Zawal).They avoid starting of new venture during midday.

Evening: The evening is seen as a transitional period, better suited for concluding the day's work rather than starting something new. In Gujjar traditions, the time is considered inauspicious for sleeping or initiating new work.

Night: Nighttime is generally avoided for planning and initiating new activities due to its association with uncertainty and potential danger. There is a belief that tasks planned at night do not bear fruitful results.

Auspicious and inauspicious dates

As per Gujjar traditions, the selection of dates are very common for important upcoming events such as marriages and construction. The tribe primarily follows the Lunar (Islamic) or Bikrami calendar to determine auspicious and inauspicious dates for these ceremonies. Gujjars give equal importance to both Islamic and Bikrami Calander in daily life.

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Auspicious dates

Specific dates are considered highly auspicious for conducting important ceremonies and beginning new endeavors. The auspicious dates include:

5th – This date is regarded as a symbol of (Barkat) growth and making it ideal for marriages and construction.

11th – Considered sacred as (Yarmi) the date connected with Shiekh Abdul Qadar Jeelani (RA)-(Piran go Pir), this date is believed to bring divine blessings and ensure the well-being of individuals involved in the ceremonies.

22nd – Known for its association with stability and prosperity, this date is widely preferred for new beginnings.

Full moon nights are considered auspicious for all events.

This age-old tradition continues to be an integral part of their cultural heritage, reflecting their deep connection with their ancestral wisdom and spiritual beliefs.

Inauspicious dates

Certain dates in the Lunar/Bikrami calendar are considered inauspicious by the Gujjar community. These dates are avoided for conducting significant events like marriage ceremonies, house construction, or other major life events. The inauspicious dates include:

3rd, 13th, and 23rd – These dates are believed to bring misfortune and obstacles in the path of success and happiness. 8th, 18th, and 28th – These dates are also considered unfavorable, as they are associated with difficulties, struggles, and potential failures.

The community strongly advise against performing any significant rituals on these dates, as they are thought to be influenced by negative energies or unfavorable planetary positions.

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Auspicious and inauspicious months

Certain months hold varying degrees of auspiciousness in Gujjar society, influencing the timing of important social and cultural events, particularly marriages.

Auspicious months

Baisakh (April-May) and Manghar (October-November): Baisakh and Manghar are regarded as the most favorable months for weddings among the Gujjars. These months witness around 80% of all Gujjar marriages, reflecting their cultural significance. The primary reasons for their auspiciousness include:

1. **Favorable weather conditions:** Baisakh marks the onset of spring, symbolizing new beginnings, while Manghar signals the end of monsoon, making both seasons ideal for indoor and outdoor wedding celebrations.
2. **Agricultural convenience:** Since Gujjars are primarily pastoralists and agriculturists, these months align with the pre and post-harvest period, allowing families to organize weddings without disrupting their livelihoods.

Muharram and Ramadan:

1. Marriage ceremonies are rarely held during Muharram and Ramadan, two significant months in the Islamic calendar:
2. Muharram is a month of mourning in Islam, due to the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (RA) at Karbala. Gujjars, consider it disrespectful to conduct celebrations during this solemn period.

Ramadan, the holy month of fasting, is dedicated to spiritual devotion, prayer, and self-discipline. Gujjars defer marriages during this month to maintain the sanctity of fasting and worship.

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The period between two Eids

Another period when marriages are usually postponed is the time between Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha which is called "Do-Eido" in Gojri. This interval, though not explicitly prohibited, is generally avoided for marriage ceremonies.

Weather signs and interpretations

Weather phenomena have long been regarded as powerful indicators of auspicious or inauspicious times. In Gujjars, they thunderstorms, earthquakes, and eclipses have been imbued with deep symbolic meanings, often influencing human behavior, customs, and rituals.

1. Lightning and thunderstorms

Lightning and thunderstorms are commonly perceived as manifestations of divine displeasure. In Gujjars it signify unfavorable circumstances. During thunderstorms, particularly in tribal society, several precautionary measures are taken:

1. Pregnant women/ Children are advised to remain indoors, as it is believed that exposure to lightning could bring misfortune.
2. Reflective and metallic objects, including iron rods and agricultural tools, are hidden to prevent any harmful influences.
3. Lights are often off during the storm, reflecting a deep-seated fear of attracting divine wrath.

2. Earthquakes

Earthquakes are universally considered ominous signs. Traditionally, they are interpreted as warnings of impending upheaval or tragedy. In Gujjars, tremors were believed to signal displeasure of divine forces. As a result, communities would engage in prayers, rituals, or offerings to appease the divine

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forces through local shrines, believed to govern natural forces.

3. Eclipses

Both solar and lunar eclipses are deemed highly inauspicious among tribal people. The sudden darkening of the sun or moon is often associated with negative spiritual or cosmic influences. Some common beliefs and practices observed during eclipses include:

1. Rituals and important ceremonies are postponed to avoid any misfortune.
2. Pregnant women are refrained from eating or drinking during the eclipse, believing that consuming food during this time can lead to spots on skin of baby in the womb besides illness and bad luck.

Interpretation regarding rain and snow

In the region of Jammu and Kashmir, certain weather patterns and cloud formations are believed to indicate upcoming rainfall or snowfall. The following are some common interpretations of Gujjars and Bakerwals regarding rain and snow:

Lehty passy Badal

It is widely believed among Gujjars that if the western part of the sky is cloudy in the evening, there will be rain the next day. This observation has been passed down through generations, as clouds moving from the west often bring moisture-laden winds, leading to rainfall.

Teetar Khumbo Badal (Cloud resembling grey francolin wings)

Another traditional belief among Gujjars states that if clouds appear like the wings of the Grey Francolin bird (known as "Teetar Khumbo Badal"), there will be heavy rain. Such cloud formations are often associated with stormy weather and

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intense precipitation.

Wind

According to tribal wisdom, if heavy wind appears while the sky is cloudy, it is believed that there will be no rain. The strong wind disperses the moisture-laden clouds, preventing rainfall from occurring.

Slow rainfall continuing for eight days

It is commonly believed that if rain starts slowly and gently, it will continue for at least eight days. This belief suggests that prolonged light rainfall is a sign of a stable weather system bringing consistent precipitation.

Rainy season and migration of birds

The traditional Bikrami calendar month of Chaet (March) is considered the primary season of rain in the region. During this time, rain continues for several days, nourishing the land. This period is also marked by the departure of migratory birds from Jammu and Kashmir, a phenomenon referred to as "Sodhi-Nourouz ki Jhadi." The mass movement of birds is seen as a natural indicator of seasonal change.

Auspicious and inauspicious encounters in the morning

In Gujjars, the first person one encounters in the morning is often believed to influence the events of the day. Some of them brings good fortune and a few may bring bad omens:

Auspicious encounters

Meeting a religious person—such as a saint, a Pir , or a poet — early in the morning is considered highly auspicious.

People engaged in physical labour, such as cobblers, ironsmiths, carpenters, and other artisans, symbolize hard work and prosperity. Meeting them in the morning is seen as a sign of productivity and success for the day ahead.

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The face of a loved one—be it a parent, spouse, child, or dear friend—is always a source of happiness and positivity. Seeing them early in the morning is believed to bring the inner peace throughout the day.

Encountering a person carrying food grains, vegetables, or agricultural products symbolizes abundance and prosperity.

Crossing paths with a marriage procession in the morning is thought to bring success and happiness.

Inauspicious encounters

1. Encountering a person who looks down upon you or treats you inferior is considered inauspicious.
2. Encountering a beggar in the morning is often considered a bad omen. Some believe it signifies financial loss or misfortune during the day.
3. Encountering a person you dislike can bring negativity and mental distress.
4. Hearing about someone's death as first thing in the morning can cast a shadow of grief and sorrow over the entire day

Inauspicious house and beliefs of Gujjars

Gujjars consider certain houses inauspicious based on recurring misfortunes and supernatural influences. These beliefs have been passed down for generations and are often linked to traditional wisdom, spiritual considerations, and experiences of the past. Below are some common signs of an inauspicious house according to Gujjar beliefs:

1. A house that remains dark, even during daylight, is often regarded as inauspicious. According to Gujjar beliefs, such houses lack divine blessings and positive energy.
2. If a household experiences frequent illnesses among its

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members, Gujjars believe that the place may be cursed or occupied by negative spiritual forces.

3. A house where unnatural deaths of humans and animals happen, frequent accidents occur is considered highly inauspicious by Gujjars. They believe that the souls of the deceased might not have attained peace and may continue to haunt the place. Such houses are often abandoned, or special prayers are conducted to ward off evil spirits. Gujjars may consult spiritual healers (Pirs) or religious scholars to purify the home.
4. Houses where constant disputes and disharmony exist among family members are considered cursed or affected by negative energy. Gujjars believe that an invisible force may be causing conflicts, leading to broken relationships and unhappiness.
5. Among Gujjars, fertility is seen as a divine blessing, and a house where couples remain childless is thought to be under a curse.

Auspicious numbers

Numbers have always held symbolic and spiritual meanings across various cultures. Among the Gujjars and Bakerwals, the numbers 5, 11 and 40 are considered particularly auspicious. This number is deeply connected with their religious and cultural beliefs

Number 40 (Chali)

The number 40 (Chali) holds a special place in Gujjar culture and traditions. It is considered significant in various aspects of life, from religious and spiritual practices to social customs. Whether in times of joy or sorrow, the observance of a forty-day period is deeply ingrained in the beliefs and rituals of the Gujjar community.

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1. Mourning period for the deceased

When a person passes away in the Gujjar community, mourning lasts for forty days. During this period, family members lead a simple life, focusing on prayers and remembrance of the departed soul. On the fortieth day, a special prayer and charitable acts are performed. This belief is rooted in the idea that the soul of the deceased remains in a transitional state for forty days before fully departing to the afterlife.

2. Chilla (Spiritual devotion)

The number forty is also significant in religious and spiritual practices. Many saints and spiritual leaders have undertaken a forty-day period of intense worship and meditation to attain spiritual enlightenment. This practice, known as 'Chilla' or 'Siddhi Karna,' is believed to purify the soul and bring one closer to God.

3. Adopting or quitting a habit

It is widely believed among Gujjars that if a person consistently follows a new habit for forty days, it becomes a permanent part of their life. Similarly, if someone wants to quit a bad habit, they should abstain from it for forty consecutive days to ensure complete transformation.

4. Overcoming grief and emotional healing

After experiencing a major loss or trauma, the Gujjars observe a forty-day period of grief and support for the affected family. During this time, close relatives and friends offer condolences and assistance. After the completion of this period, life gradually returns to normal, symbolizing the acceptance of fate and moving forward.

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5. Seasonal migration

The nomadic Gujjar-Bakarwal community follows a pattern of seasonal migration, and the number forty plays a crucial role in this practice. Their migration, whether to the high-altitude pastures in summer or back to the plains in winter, is generally completed within forty days. This traditional timeframe ensures a smooth and organized transition for both people and livestock.

6. First forty days of marriage

In Gujjar culture, the first forty days of a newly-wed bride in her husband's home are considered extremely important. This period is meant for the bride to adapt to her new environment, build relationships with her in-laws, and settle into her new life. Special care and attention are given to her to ensure a smooth transition.

7. Shaving a child's first hair

The first haircut of a newborn is also connected to the significance of forty. In some traditions, a child's hair is shaved within forty days of birth, as it is believed to promote healthy growth and bring blessings to the child's life.

The number forty (Chali) in Gujjar culture is not merely a numerical value but carries profound spiritual, cultural, and social significance. From religious devotion to mourning practices, seasonal migration, and personal development, the observance of the forty-day period plays a pivotal role in various aspects of life. This deep-rooted tradition reflects the strong connection between numbers, rituals, and life transitions in the Gujjar way of living.

Spiritual significance

The number 11 is closely linked with the legendary Sufi saint Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jeelani (RA). The title "Yarmi Allo Pir"

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itself refers to the 11th, as "Yarmi" means eleven in Gojri language. This connection has made the number 11 an integral part of the Gujjar-Bakerwal spiritual traditions. They believe that invoking this number brings prosperity, protection, and divine support in their endeavors.

Number 11 (Yaraan)

Offering of Niaz on the 11th of the lunar month

One of the most prominent practice among Gujjars and Bakerwals is offering Niaz (charity food distribution) on the 11th day of Islamic lunar month. They believe that invoking this number brings prosperity, protection, and divine support in their endeavors.

Monetary offerings and the role of 11 in ventures

Whenever Gujjars and Bakerwals embark on a new construction project, join a competition, or initiate any major life venture, they keep an amount of Rs.11/- to Rs.11,000/- on the name of "Yarmi". This practice is believed to ensure success. Upon completing their goal or winning the challenge, they express their gratitude by organizing a special feast, which prominently features *Metho Bhaat*—a sweet dish made of rice cooked with jaggery (*Gudh*).

The appearance of 11 as a good omen

Gujjars and Bakerwals consider the appearance of the number 11 in various forms a sign of good luck. Whether it appears in important dates /numbers, the presence of 11 is interpreted as a divine message of positivity and prosperity. It is believed that such occurrences are not mere coincidences but indications of spiritual alignment and blessings.

Number 5 (Panjh) in Gujjar culture

The number five (Panjh) holds a significant place in the

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Gujjar community. It is deeply associated with their spiritual and traditional practices, symbolizing prosperity, blessings, and sacredness.

Panjh Pir

In every Gujjar locality, one can find a shrine or "Takiya" dedicated to "Panjh Pir"—a group of five revered spiritual leaders but no one know the names of all the five Pirs. Each area has its own Pirs. Gujjars honour these saints by offering feasts and "Niaz" in their names, seeking divine blessings for their families and livestock.

Number five – a symbol of growth and prosperity

For the Gujjars, the number five is associated with "Barkat" (growth and wealth). A local plant, known as "Panjh Patro Bano," has a unique characteristic of bearing five leaves in each cluster. This plant is considered auspicious, and a branch of it is often placed in food grain storage to attract "Barkat" and prosperity. Out of respect for its spiritual significance, Gujjars refrain from using its wood for firewood.

Panjh Tan Pak (the five pure souls)

The Gujjars revere the number five as a representation of the "Panjh Tan Pak," the five pure souls of Islam:

Hazrat Mohammad (PBUH)
Hazrat Ali (RA)
Hazrat Fatima (RA)
Hazrat Hassan (RA)
Hazrat Hussain (RA)

Their faith in these five divine figures strengthens their devotion and spiritual beliefs, influencing their customs and traditions.

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Panjh Kalyan

Among Gujjars, animals that possess five distinctive white markings are considered highly auspicious. These markings include:

White-colored feet
White tail
White forehead with a half-moon marking
White muzzle (nose)
White mark on the back

Such animals are often treated with special care, as they are believed to bring good fortune and blessings to their owners.

Five sons – a symbol of luck and prosperity

In Gujjar society, a mother who gives birth to five sons is considered the luckiest woman. It is widely believed that having five sons ensures prosperity and strength within the family. Families with five sons are thought to experience success, protection, and financial stability.

Panj Pehar

The concept of "Panj Pehar" holds deep significance in traditional timekeeping and cultural practices, particularly among the Gujjar community. In the ancient Indian and Islamic traditions, the day and night are divided into eight Pehars—four during the daytime and four at night—each marking a specific passage of time. In Gujjars -Bakerwals the evening is regarded as the meeting point of these divisions, where the last Pehar of the day transitions into the first Pehar of the night.

In Gujjars sleeping during this time is discouraged because it is considered an inauspicious act that may disrupt the spiritual sanctity of the moment.

Panjh Nimaz -Five Daily Prayers: In Islamic tradition, which

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many Gujjars follow, five daily prayers (Salah) form the foundation of spiritual discipline.

Superstitions

Superstitions have been an integral part of Gujjar society, influencing their daily lives, traditions, and cultural practices. These beliefs, often passed down through generations, shape decision-making and social behaviors. Here are some common superstitions followed by the Gujjars:

If medicine slips from one's hand and goes to waste, it is believed that the sick person will recover soon.

If milk spills from someone's hand and goes to waste, it is considered a sign of bad luck for the person holding it.

If an animal makes a noise (Mal Rahmey) at the beginning of a journey, it is considered inauspicious, and some may postpone or cancel their travel plans.

Birds that typically create sounds at night are considered omens of misfortune if they vocalize during daylight. This is believed to foretell drought, lack of food, or insufficient rainfall in the area.

If a hen crows like a rooster, it is thought to be an ill omen for the household and the surrounding area.

It is prohibited to look into a mirror after sunset, as it is believed to bring bad luck or attract negative energies.

People are discouraged from going to water sources, such as wells or rivers, in darkness, as it is believed that spirits reside there.

Washing one's head on Thursdays, washing clothes on Tuesdays, and cutting nails in the evening are not allowed, as these acts are believed to bring misfortune.

A man whose parents are still alive is not supposed to eat the

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head of a cooked chicken, as it is considered disrespectful and unlucky.

If a spider is found on a person's head, it is believed that guests will visit them soon.

A knife or an iron object is placed near a newborn child and a pregnant woman to ward off evil spirits and negative energies.

Women are not allowed to wear red dresses while crossing a ripened crop field, especially rice fields, as it is believed to bring bad luck to the harvest.

If a bride or groom's skin glows on their wedding day, it is considered a sign of honesty and faithfulness in their marriage.

These superstitions, deeply rooted in Gujjar culture, reflect their worldview, fears, and aspirations. While modern influences have led to the questioning of some of these beliefs, many still hold significance in the daily lives of the Gujjars, shaping their customs and social practices.

Flickering of the left eye is believed to bring bad news.

A crow's harsh call is considered a sign of impending misfortune.

If a shoe turns upside down while being unworn, it is thought to bring unwanted traveling for the wearer.

If someone hears a ringing or buzzing sound in their ear, it is believed to forewarn bad luck.

If a woman or a cat crosses one's path at the start of a journey, it is considered inauspicious.

Hearing a snake's hiss inside the house is believed to be a sign of impending misfortune. Niaz- Food Charity- is offered.

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Seeing a bed upside down while traveling is considered an omen of bad luck during the journey.

If someone calls a traveler back just as they begin their journey, it is seen as an ill omen.

These are some of the superstitions common among Gujjar tribe in Jammu and Kashmir.

(The author works as Cheif Editor, Gojri, in JKAACL.)

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FINDING MEANING IN LIFE THROUGH ART

Dr M Maroof Shah

"Man can live without science, he can live without bread, but without beauty he could no longer live, because there would no longer be anything to do to the world. The whole secret is here, the whole of history is here." Dostoevsky

"It is told that once Ananda, the beloved disciple of the Buddha, saluted his master and said: "Half of the holy life, O master, is friendship with the beautiful, association with the beautiful, communion with the beautiful." "Say not so, Ananda, say not so!" the master replied. "It is not half the holy life; it is the whole of the holy life."
(Samyutta Nikaya)

"We are concerned, in short, about the meaning of our existence, our parts in the human drama. However, the purpose of one's participation in the human drama could be known fully only by knowing the meaning of the drama as a whole – through comprehending the ultimate truths pertaining to the whys and wherefores of human existence and history. For each of us, then, our questioning is, whether we like it or not, and whether we acknowledge it or not, a desire to understand the ultimate meanings that would explain for each of us the significance of our participation in the cosmic process."
(Hughes, 2003: 19-20).

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It has been a consensus of all traditional cultures that the Sacred is central to the task of meaning of life. (And religion, along with art and philosophy, have been attempts to access the same.) According to Eliade, the task today is to provide the modern man, haunted by nihilism, with a new access to the Sacred. He explains:

> It is difficult to imagine how the human mind could function without the conviction that there is something irreducibly real in the world; and it is impossible to imagine how consciousness could appear without conferring a meaning on man's impulses and experiences. Consciousness of a real and meaningful world is intimately connected with the discovery of the sacred. Through experience of the sacred, the human mind has perceived the difference between what reveals itself as being real, powerful, rich, and meaningful and what lacks these qualities, that is, the chaotic and dangerous flux of things, their fortuitous and senseless appearances and disappearances (Eliade, 1969: Preface).

He further points out that:

> "(S)acred" is an element of the structure of consciousness and not a stage in the history of consciousness. On the most archaic levels of culture, living, considered as being human, is in itself a religious act, for food-getting, sexual life, and work have a sacramental value. In other words, to be – or rather to become – a man signifies being "religious." (Eliade, 1969: Preface)

Despite methodological or official disavowal, the Sacred has been making a claim in the world of science in a way. Acknowledgment of significance and tributes paid to our experience of the mysterious and wonder by Einstein, to beauty in mathematical world by Dirac and Russell, to intelligence marking its presence everywhere by Hawking, and to what Dawkins simply called sacred are a few illustrations. To quote Dawkins: "The feeling of awed wonder that science can give us is one of the highest experiences of which the human psyche is capable. It is a deep aesthetic passion to rank with the finest

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that music and poetry can deliver. It is truly one of the things that make life worth living and it does so, if anything, more effectively if it convinces us that the time we have for living is quite finite." (Dawkins, 2006)

Theological and metaphysical significance of beauty

We may note the fundamental point of departure is traditionally shared metaphysical understanding of art as a channel of transcendence or one of the languages of the divine – "beauty as the splendor of Truth" or "the attractive power of the Good" and of aesthetics as something beyond worldly experience – Abhinavgupta has used the word *Alaukika'* to distinguish it from the mundane experiences. Aesthetic experience and mystic experience are not very different when we penetrate deeper into the phenomenology of experience as has been argued by scholars of diverse persuasions. Art is in fact formal expression of mystical vision or perception of Ideas in contemplation. As aesthetic experience is also cognitive in certain sense – Knowledge is Joy and distance or alienation from reality is sorrow and God is Bliss or *Ananda* – exploring aesthetic route to transcendence is quite fruitful to bridge the gulf between those who find God or transcendence inaccessible and those who find God everywhere or everything a symbol of the Beyond. God catches most people through the net of beauty, said Plato and aesthetic argument is something that can convince almost all. Nietzsche and many postmoderns agree that existence is justifiable in aesthetic terms. Creation narratives across traditions seem to imply aesthetic motives to be fundamental in explaining the why of creation. Beauty is its own justification. No other arguments are needed when one understands something is beautiful. God is Beauty and Joy according to different traditions. Mystics agree that all experiences may convey the taste of the Beyond. Artistic perception involves effacing the ego resulting in transcendence

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which is joy. So the mystic's argument against absurdists is simply an invitation to cleanse the doors of perception and encountering things aesthetically which is what seeing things in God is like. Artist's vocation as described by Underhill in *Practical Mysticism* recalls a similar trajectory. All things in God are glorious and beautiful. Beauty may be incomprehensible at rational plane but it is soul-ravishing and that evaporates the need to comprehend it. The universe as an embodiment of bliss, as an aesthetic object is what mystical approach to it shows it to be. 'There is no beauty but Beauty' is how Islamic declaration of faith has been rendered by Sufi metaphysicians. Everything is perfect as it is according to saints but seeing this is what demands transcendence of passions and ego and attachment to samsara. For a nirvanic consciousness all things are bathed in transcendental glory. Buddha saw everything smiling when he attained nirvana. Unconditional affirmation of the world and the imperative of *amor fati* (love of fate) advocated by Nietzsche implies similar presupposition. There is nothing to be explained, no need to explain anything for the twice born. There is everything to be contemplated, loved and enjoyed. This constitutes the crux of traditional view of things and this view is available to all and sundry. Beauty is its own unceasing reward . As C. S. Lewis noted in *The Weight of Glory*

> We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words–to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. That is why we have peopled air and earth and water with gods and goddesses and nymphs and elves–that, though we cannot, yet these projections can, enjoy in themselves that beaut,y grace, and power of which Nature is the image. (Lewis, 1941)

(Post)Modern literature is largely about coming to terms with the despairing answer suggested by contemporary science

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and philosophy and modern literature has been a mirror of this malaise of this age. The God of certain theology may be dead but of the artist who has transcended his narrow cage of personality and a mystic or an ordinary believer who has not lost the attitude of thanksgiving, of seeing life as sacrament, of wondering about the moral law within or the reign of the Good and discerning meaning of traditional symbols, God can't die. They glorify him for all the "dappled things." Father Zossima's conviction (in *The Brothers Karamazarov*) that paradise is here with us, all around us if we only knew (a similar idea is present in Rumi, Hafiz, Bedil, great Romantics and in fact in all great poets who believe with Blake in the power of Imagination – C. M. Bowra notes that, for Blake, 'imagination is nothing less than God as he operates in the human soul. It follows that any act of creation performed by the imagination is divine and that in the imagination man's spiritual nature is fully and finally realized' (Bowra, 1977: 89) – and through it our access to something of Heaven here and now) is laughed away by modern bats who fail to come out of the cave/dark night of the soul with the counterclaim regarding omnipresence of darkness of hell from which there is no exit. Let us note that poetry continues to be written even after Auswitzch or "death of literature" and art continues to be a mode of worship/or element of worship for countless millions in the secular world. Men continue to aspire for wholeness and meaning and refute the despairing contention that life is pointless. Transcendence – its fragmentary images of course – nourishes modern or postmodern man as it has been nurturing traditional man.

Livingstone building on Coomaraswamy's explication of traditional doctrine of art, thus presents the relationship between art and transcendence:

> ...(T)he perfection of man is in knowledge immediate, intuitive,

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> direct knowledge of reality or God. Works of art are among the best means developed by man for imparting principal knowledge. As we have seen, works of art are reminders; they are supports of contemplation. Their beauty, their power of shock and purification, their capacity for ordering the disparate elements of our nature, all these are qualities that make them very effective with persons with the innate ability or with the training to employ them as they are intended by the Traditional artist (Livingstone, 1962).

One may add another passage from Coomaraswamy that describes the function of art:

> Now since the contemplation and understanding of these works is to serve the needs of the soul, that is to say in Plato's own words, to attune our own distorted modes of thought to cosmic harmonies, "so that by an assimilation of the knower to the to-be-known, the archetypal nature, and coming to be in that likeness, we may attain at last to be a part in that 'life's best that has been appointed by the Gods to man for this time being and hereafter," or stated in Indian terms, to effect our own metrical integration through the imitation of the divine forms; and because, as the Upanishad reminds us, "one comes to be of just such stuff as that on which the mind is set," it follows that it is not only requisite that the shapes of art should be adequate reminders of their paradigms, but that the nature of these paradigms themselves must be of the utmost importance. . . (Qtd in Livingston, 1962).

God or the Real or what alone is said to quell all anxieties and makes souls rest, is, in Simone Weil's apt phrase, "attention without distraction." The invitation of Revelations is "to stand still and know that I am God." It means our task that saves us is to just be, to sit alone, to listen, to attend to the other. God is the non-self or Other that gazes at us from every face as Levinas echoing Sufis or mystics in other traditions as well would say. Hafiz has given us the ideal of attention: "How do I listen to others? As if everyone were my Master speaking to me his cherished last words." Martin Buber's *I and Thou* explains the point: "When a person encounters another person in total

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immediacy, he or she may also experience a glimpse of God." Hafiz elaborates further: If God invited you to a party and said, "Everyone in the ballroom tonight/will be my special guest,"/ how would you then treat them?/And I know there is no one in this world/who is not standing upon His jeweled dance floor."

All problems are ultimately traceable to (our) failure to open up to love in its full sense, Dostoevsky and Iris Murdoch tell us. And this turn is traceable to failure to perceive beauty everywhere. What really attracts us is beauty. What we perceive as beautiful we don't resist to open to. All events we experience are coded messages from God telling us "I love you," Simone Weil says. Those who have given their hearts to beauty and the game of love have nothing more to ask for.

Life is the meaning of Life. When life is truly – soulfully, aesthetically, intensely, ecstatically – lived, we don't debate the meaning of life. Life pinches sometimes and we begin to worry about its meaning. But if we are truly creative, truly worshipful, truly open to love, we are celebrating or participating in the higher meaning of life. Most of us fail to find life meaningful on its own terms because we aren't ready to dissolve into its mystery and beauty. We want it to move on our terms and make ego the king and that is the secret of our perpetual slavery. We approach it from the viewpoint of instrumental reason or manipulating self deployed in sciences and not the humanities that fundamentally seek/have traditionally sought not to control/use but to understand, to let the other bloom. Life itself is beautiful or blissful beyond imagination – and calls for our gratitude for the gift – according to the divine wisdom vouchsafed to prophets and saints. No decent person would vote for ingratitude. Ingratitude leads to despair. And that is what hell really stands for. None puts man into hell; he plunges into it. And this drama is happening every moment. Art is an invitation to pay attention to beauty in all its forms and its

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otherworldly roots or depths.

Creation narratives across traditions seem to imply aesthetic motives to be fundamental in explaining the why of creation. Beauty is its own justification. No other arguments are needed when one understands something is intrinsically beautiful. God is Beauty and Joy according to different traditions. All explanations have to stop somewhere and they stop at Beauty and that is why we identify God with Beauty and saying God we imply a full stop. And that reconciles us to life and thus gives it meaning.

Mystics agree that all experiences (including negative ones like humiliation, frustration) may convey the taste of the Beyond and thus can be beautiful from a certain perspective – from God's perspective all is part of harmony and thus justifiable in aesthetic terms. Nietzsche invites us to these dizzy heights from where you despise nothing and with Buddha smile on the tragicomedy of existence. Ibn Arabi is also speaking from six thousand feet above the earth when he says that he has not seen human shit. Artistic perception involves effacing the ego and being receptive to things as they are – as they disclose to us or as God addresses us through them or approaching them contemplatively and aesthetically which is what seeing things in God is like.

What fuels absurdist view is supposed density of things or indifference of the Copernician universe to our ideals. Art is a way of overcoming this impasse. The moment one is capable of loving (not just accepting) fate, of unconditional love, of affirming even eternal recurrence one is delivered and the universe loses its indifference or density and appears a perpetual miracle, an object of endless wonder that delights the soul, a gift for which one needs to be eternally thankful, a festival of lights and a celestial musical recital. There are

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countless mystics of all ages who bear witness to this and one can't or needn't review mystical literatures of the world here that describe God as Joy and the Other as Beloved and thus the universe as the veiled Garden of Eden. Developing an eye for its heavenly beauty is what mediates felicity or salvation. This is what Spinoza achieved by calling for intellectual love of God and Wittgenstein stated by saying "The work of art is the object seen *sub species aeternitatis* and the good life is the world seen *sub species aeternitatis*. This is the connection between art and ethics." For him the problem of meaning of life is the problem of how to live, how to live so that life stops being problematic. "Everything is perfect." "How things stand is God." If you feel giddy or have doubts, consider Wittgenstein again: "For doubts can only exist where a question exists; a question can only exist where an answer exists, and this can only exist where something can be said."

Beauty needs no introduction because God grounds it and how come God would need an introduction or letter of recommendation? He is the attractive power of beauty. We might be tempted to deny God in our sceptical moments or at least grant our failure to comprehend His presence near and around and within us but we can't deny that we are attracted to beauty in human face, in smiles, in innocent gestures, in sounds, in rhythms, in colours. In fact in everything one can discover beauty, and if one can't, one is spiritually blind. As beings all things including the lowliest or seemingly ugly or harmful are beautiful as Ghazzali and Eckhart said. In God nothing is ugly; whatever ugliness we see is because we see things outside God or through manipulating utilitarian self. Abu Yazid said that he saw nothing without first seeing God. That is precisely what Nagarjuna means when he exclaims *samsara* is *nirvana* or this world is Heaven. A saint was asked by an atheist where is God and he pointed to mountains and landscape around and said

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see it. See it, attend to it, contemplate it and get lost in it and one has seen something from God. For the gnostic all things are *tajilliyat* – epihphanies. It is arts that have preserved this way of seeing the world. A poet see more beauty than non-poets. He also creates it as does any artist. Joyce talks about an epiphany his hero experienced on seeing a wading girl. However, a saint is capable of seeing God in everything. A flower is enough as a proof for God for him as Schuon has remarked. The tragedy is we fail to see as lovers and saints see. We have lost the faculty of seeing as Adam saw in Paradise before the Fall. All things are Infinite if we could truly see and then angels would shake hands with us as they did with Blake. This means defamiliarization of the world as the task of art will ever be relevant. God is ever in His new glory implying certain freshness in phenomena can't be ruled out every time we see them. Poetry helps us to unveils new layers and layers of beauty whenever we perceive things.

If the idea of worship implies reverent devotion to the Other that is not the self and not for the fortification of the self but its liberation in love and devotion, all humans can be said to worship God in the aspect of Beauty. We are all moved by the beauty of the soul and that is why all of us bow before the presence of saints. To be man is to love beauty.

Salvific function of humanities: The case of poetry

One notes the function of poetry as provision for discovering the good and beautiful in all that meets and surrounds one (Coleridge), "truth telling, which is why in the Celtic tradition no one could be a teacher unless he or she was a poet," reconciliation with the world/celebration of love/women – one may recall Wallace Stevens' remark "A poet looks at the world the way a man looks at a woman," and Holderlin's point that the duty of the poet is "to stand/Bare-headed under the

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storms of God,/Grasping with our own hand/The Father's beam itself, And to offer the gift of heaven, /Wrapped in song, to the people." Art calls for total attention to the object to be contemplated or vision of its form in the world of forms and craftsmen are consumed by their work that constitutes their *svadharma*, tie mantra and that is true life, an approximation of the Kingdom of God. Art as an ally of religion saves us better and without it leads us to appreciate better why one needs a jump, a plunge, a surrender to the Other and thus flow with the Tao of life. When we note, with Baudelaire, that "Any healthy man can go without food for two days - but not without poetry" and recall the advice of Muriel Rukeyser "Breathe-in experience, breathe-out poetry," one sees how poetry is of central importance for life and salvation of all mankind. It has been well observed that life blooms by virtue of appreciation or celebration and no wonder God and we need to bless life.

Indeed, to be is to write. It is, more primordially, to speak and to speak in the original or true sense is to Read these points with Shelley's "Defense of Poetry" and recall key statements of great poets in different traditions on their divine calling one can't fail to note how poetry is affirmation of life suffused by love and vivified by the sacred, witness of truth, attention to beauty and a means for salvation.

Since the poet doesn't invent but listens as Jean Cocteau noted and "We never come to thoughts. They come to us" as Heidegger pointed out, the poet's job is to seek to just be and this attunes one to higher cosmic rhythms. This requires perfecting the discipline of attention after rising high above the chatter or noise of ego/mind/ordinary consciousness by cultivating silence.

Art owes its enchantment to what Russian formalists called defamiliarization and the magic of creative activity is itself

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connected to phenomenology of newness, of wonder. As Bedil puts it:

"Upon need at a stranger's door prostrate/But raise not your solicitous gaze to a familiar face."

When will we ask from educationists to educate us and our children in the school of life that requires art? Without the medium of art education is not possible. Without art education, we are literate but uneducated. And given squeezed space for orally transmitted salvific wisdom and other cultural formations, we don't know how to live deeper, richer, more meaningful, more joyful lives without edifying presence of humanities. Our failure to unconditionally affirm or celebrate life while wedded to our very destiny of living in destitute times where edifying accounts of lives of saints like the one quoted below are absent. It is nevertheless better to keep alive the memory of mystics who better than poets as ordinarily known show us the path of "fugitive gods." Thus final words I give to the great Indian mystic Ram Tirtha who declared that red rays of the sun were his muscles. When anything came across his eyes, he robed it in God and then saw that there was nothing else but God. He thus addresses winds: "Blow, O breezes, mingle O winds, with these words whose purpose is the same as yours./ O laughter! laugher!/ I inextinguishable joy and laughter." Humanities in general and art in particular are geared to make access to this fount of joy possible for all.

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(The author is a writer of note, based in Srinagar.)

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SHINĀ MUHAWRAAY GAI MITHALE

A repository of Shina cultural wisdom

Tariq Ahmad Khan

Verbal language is the primary medium through which oral traditions, folklore, folk songs, folk-dance, folk-tales and stories are passed down through generations. These cultural artefacts encapsulate the values and beliefs of a community, reflecting the *weltanschauung* and identity of its speakers. Every language has its uniqueness. Be it in idioms, and proverbs or maxims and adages, they capture the essence of a community's way of life and their relationship with the outside world. The book *Shinā Muhawraay Gai Mithale* (Shina Idioms and Proverbs) written by Masaud Hassan Samoon, (former Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Gold Medallist in Persian from University of Kashmir and above all a native speaker of Shina language) represents a milestone in Shina linguistic and cultural preservation. As the first book of its kind in the Shina language (Gurezi Shina-a dialectical variant of Shina language spoken in Gurez valley of District Bandipora in J&K, India), it undertakes the monumental task of documenting the rich tapestry of idiomatic expressions, proverbs, phrases, and adages that have been an integral part of the language's oral tradition for centuries. Beyond being a linguistic resource, the book serves as a repository of cultural wisdom, offering a

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lens through which readers can view the collective experiences, traditions, and values of Shina society. In an era marked by the increasing neglect and marginalisation of indigenous languages, this book arrives as a vital contribution, aiming to preserve the Shina language and its associated cultural heritage for future generations.

Shinā Muhawraay Gai Mithale holds the distinction of being the first comprehensive compilation dedicated solely to idiomatic expressions and proverbs in the Shina language. Traditionally passed down through the oral means, these idioms have remained undocumented, existing only in the collective memory of the generations of yore. This book aspires to remove the apprehensions of their death, capturing these expressions in written form and organizing them alphabetically.

The book's initial plates provide an insightful overview of Shina as a language, its evolution, and its role in reflecting the social, cultural, and environmental realities of the region. The author aptly emphasises the vital connection between language and identity, making a compelling case for the urgent need to document such linguistic treasures before they are lost to time.

This treasure trove of Shina Valley is organised alphabetically in original Shina script with equivalent translations in Urdu, ensuring accessibility for learners unfamiliar with Shina orthography. Providing clear explanations of meanings alongside conversational examples enriches understanding of their role in Shina life. As one delves into the book, the nuances of Shina language and its unique expressions come to the fore. These proverbs are often used metaphorically, ironically and figuratively to convey nuanced meaning that reflects the cultural ethos of this society, offering insights into its values, traditions and collective experiences. For instance, there are proverbs that highlight the relationships of this society:

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"نے ٹیکریں بآت اسپا۔"

The rice from a new pot is sweet(or)
New beginnings are always sweet(or)
New brooms sweep clean

This phrase is used to express the joy and excitement of new relationship, and the promise of happy times ahead.

"ماں ہیں نیل جٹ مالہ ہوں دذ داس۔"

A mother's love is nourishing and lifegiving, like a lush green field where as
father's love is harsh and withered, like a burnt and withered path.

"آجہ ہیں کوں بآبہ گنے۔"

The mother's influence makes father more compassionate.

These proverbs suggest that a mother's presence and influence has a positive effect on the father's behaviour, making him more caring and empathetic towards children.

Through other proverbs, the book reveals the ethos of the Shina people and the ways they think and weigh the situations. These expressions are loaded with wit, humour, and a deep connection to nature. For example, proverbs related to the mountains like:

"کھوڑ پلنیونہ۔"

To travel through a mountainous pass (or)
To navigate a challenging and winding path(or)
A herculean task

This phrase is often used metaphorically to describe overcoming obstacles, facing difficulties, or traversing a tough journey in life. Historically, Raazdhan pass which is a natural barrier between Shina valley and rest of the world, gets closed

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during winter for almost four months. Many people have died in past while travelling through it in the harsh winters to fetch essential commodities like food and clothes. During this perilous journey, many people would lose their lives. Due to the risks involved with this travel, the Shina people used it as a catch phrase to highlight the hardships associated with it.

"کونٹہ اوَلجوں تیٹٹہ کھڑنے۔"

A thorn is sharp from the very beginning (or)
Intelligence reveals itself from the very beginning.

This expression suggests that a person's intelligence, talent, or potential is often evident from an early age or from the beginning of their endeavours.

These proverbs not only highlight the prominence of natural elements in the Shina psyche but also underscore the ingenuity with which the language integrates environmental realities into day-to-day expressions.

Furthermore, the inclusion of proverbs—brief wisdom-packed sayings—adds a layer of philosophical insight, reflecting Shina values such as patience, resilience, and hospitality for which this valley is known across the Country. For instance:

"صبر تھوکینٹی جبر تھو۔"

The one who practices patience achieves victory (or)
Patience leads to triumph.

This proverb emphasizes the importance of patience and perseverance in overcoming challenges and achieving success. It suggests that those who can remain calm and composed, even in difficult situations, will ultimately emerge victorious.

Spot another saying:

"صبروں بونٹ بڑ۔"

The fruit of patience is sweet.

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This phrase emphasizes the reward of patience and perseverance. Just as a fruit ripens and becomes sweet over time, the efforts and struggles of today will yield sweet and satisfying results tomorrow.ʃ

These cultural nuances provide readers with a deeper understanding of the Shina ethos.

In light of the discussions and illustrations, the book has manifold importance for the preservation of Shina culture. Its enriching power for the Shina language can be assessed through two critical ways: by reviving idiomatic expressions on the verge of extinction and by offering a comprehensive documentation for the contemporary speakers. Since a good number of Shina speakers have migrated to other parts of the Jammu and Kashmir and are scattered in different districts like Bandipora, Srinagar, Budgam etc, this work can serve as a bridge in connecting the otherwise disconnected people with their ancestral language. Many younger Shina speakers have linguistically shifted towards dominant languages like English, Kashmiri and Urdu, resulting in the erosion of the traditional idiomatic expressions. By reintroducing these expressions into the mainstream, the book empowers readers to rediscover and incorporate them into daily conversations. This linguistic revival fosters a renewed sense of pride in Shina identity, particularly for younger generations who may feel disconnected from their ancestral language that possesses equally viable sources enabling it to qualify for living rich language.

Historically speaking, the proverbs adages are cultural signposts, each one encapsulating a piece of history, belief, or social behaviour. For example, Shina sayings that reference the harsh winters of the region reveal much about the resilience and resourcefulness of its people. For instance:

"یمہ بُز بیُونہ۔"

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To be completely devastated or wrecked (due to flood).

This proverb is often used to describe a situation where someone or something is severely damaged or destroyed, either physically, emotionally, or financially. In the context of Shina culture and history, it is more related to floods occurring almost every second year at some places causing destruction to the property and cattle due to cloudbursts or snow avalanches happening for ages.

"یاتہ شَربیل نییتہ جَربیل۔"

In youth or in old age
You'll pay the price anyhow.

This adage suggests that the consequences of one's actions will be faced either in the energy and impulsiveness of youth or in the reflection and regret of old age.

Similarly, sayings tied to traditional agriculture, such as potato and beans cultivation, or the hospitality rituals unique to Shina households, bring to life the simplicity, customs and rhythms of Shina society.

"ژنہ گَینَ پھالیٹ بان بڑیے آلہ۔"

The lady called Chani went to fetch seeds for sowing
but returned after the harvest was over.

It highlights the protracted nature of the journey involved in accruing seeds from other places due to non-availability, which can lead to delays and missed opportunities for timely sowing.

"بَری گَنے مَناچہ ریے گَنے مَناچہ۔"

A guest is guest, irrespective of receiving him with joy or grin.
(or)
A guest is guest whether you receive him with warmth or with scorn.

The below phrase is an expression of hospitality of this

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community which encourages mutual support, empathy, and understanding, highlighting the importance of building strong connections and communities.

"بتہ پلیونہ"

To ask for help or to offer help

One more phrase can be added to it which is associated with the livestock (on which most of the Shina speaking people were dependent for financial support), used to describe a situation where someone is following others without questioning or thinking critically much like sheep following each other:

"ایلی نوشٹ۔"

To follow like sheep (or)

To imitate without thinking

There are other proverbs used in the community that show the local or traditional way of treating some diseases to alleviate pain and promote healing, for example:

"اوٗنگے شٹیوونہ۔"

Treating a horse's fracture with a red-hot sickle. (or)

Hot-shot

As mentioned above, the phrase suggests the traditional folk remedy for treating a horse's fracture by using a hot sickle to burn the affected part of its body.

By documenting these proverbs, the book not only preserves the Shina language but also safeguards a broader cultural heritage that has shaped its expressions. As the author puts it in the foreword that to understand the nature of any community, it is not only important but inevitable to go through the proverbs, maxims and idioms of that language, as they are actually the outcome of the events throughout the centuries. Be it individual or collective, they are based on the sayings of the old sages,

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collective wisdom, folk songs, stories or borrowed from other linguistic and cultural traditions. AS Shina exhibits linguistic affinities with its neighbouring languages, notably Kashmiri and Urdu due to historical and cultural reasons, the influence of these languages on Shina is evident in its lexical, phonological and grammatical structures.

The thoughtful inclusion of translation in Urdu equivalent phrases wherever available and the contextual examples from the Shina community ensures the book's accessibility to a diverse audience. Philological enthusiasts, educators and students of linguistics will especially find the compilation engaging and practical. Additionally, it caters to both casual readers looking to learn a few useful proverbs and the researchers seeking an in-depth exploration of idiomatic patterns in Shina language.

(The author teaches English, in Higher Education Department, Govt of Jammu & Kashmir.)

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PINDUBAL

The holy confluence of Breng valley

Er. Vinod Kumar

Anantnag is the southernmost district of Kashmir Valley. In this district there is a beautiful valley known as Breng Valley. It is is located on Anantnag–Kishtwar Road via Daksum. Kokernag is a sub-district and has a notified area committee . There is now a Tehsil Headquarter at Kokernag. The place is known for its flower gardens, pristine fresh water springs and trout farms. It is about 25 km from Anantnag via NH244 (Anantnag–Kishtwar Road). It is one of the most popular weekend getaways from Srinagar.

In Nilamatapurana and Rajatarangini, the area of Breng Valley is referred to as Bring Khshetra. Known as 'The Golden Crown of Kashmir', the valley is named after the River *Bringi* (now turned into a stream) which is a tributary of famous Vitasta (River Jhelum). The valley spans over 40 km on either side of *Bringi.* Kokernag is the center of this valley where famous Kokernag Botanical Gardens are located. The valley has been praised by the Kashmiri saint Nund Rishi as '*Breng chhu*

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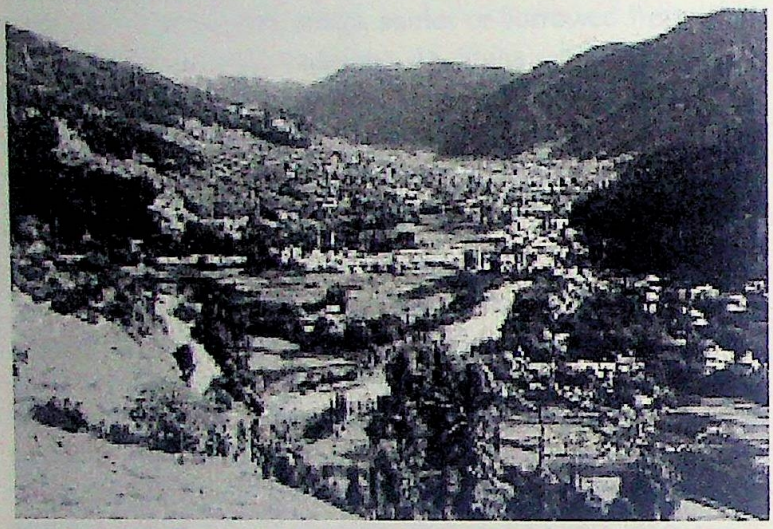

Pindubal (The holy confluence of Breng Valley)

sonsund preng', (Breng Valley is the golden crown of Kashmir).

The lush green Breng valley is blessed with many places of religious and historical importance. There is a place in Breng valley (near Wailoo) on Kokernag–Daksum road named as Pindubal which according to religious experts has the *mahima* (status) equivalent to Gaya of Bihar. Earlier, there used to be heavy snowfall in Kashmir during winter months. Breng valley also comes under heavy snowfall areas. The area used to remain cut off from the rest of the world during winters. It is said that Hindus of Breng area used to do pend dhaan (offerings to the deceased people) at Pindubal particularly during winters. The place was called Pendobal in earlier times. With the passage of time the name changed from Pendobal to Pindubal.

There is a holy sangam (confluence) of two streams at Pindubal. One stream comes from Daksum side known as Dodhkol. The primary source of Dodhkol is the glaciers in Sinthan area. Another stream comes from Gadole side known as Gadole Nallah. The source of Gadole Nallah is Mawar Nag.

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Mawar Nag is an alpine lake situated above Fattan. It is about 50 km from Kokernag at an altitude of 12500 feet. The valley comprises attractive meadows and very big and beautiful spring surrounded by mountains. Mawar Nag has crystal clear water. Water of Mawar Nag flows down via Gadole too. It is called Gadole Nallah and is one of the tributaries of Bringi River. Both the streams i.e. Dodhkol and Gadole Nallah meet at Pindubal and thus a sangam (confluence) is created. The river so formed is called Bringi River. Thus Bringi flows from Pindubal onwards. At later stages many tributaries also add waters to the Bringi River. Bringi flows down through many villages including Irkumoo. Bringi is an important tributary of holy Vitasta (River Jhelum).

It is believed that the seat of local Bairva Jumbkeshwar (Jeshtu) is at Pindubal. It is said that there was once a cave at Pindubal in which there was a Shivling. It is also said that the famous tantrik saint of Irkumoo, Swami Alakhram Ji, used to do meditation at Pindubal. It is a very sacred place as per Hindu mythology.

There is a legend that once the entire Breng area was dry and arid. There was not any proper water source. People had to depend upon snowfalls and rains only. People approached Rishi Kashyap for help. On the instructions of Rishi Kashyap, a sage called as Bring Rishi camped at Mawar Nag. Due to his saadhna (strong meditation and worshiping of Lord Shiva) he succeeded in creating a water source which flows through Gadole and reaches Pindubal. Since some areas of Kishtwar side were also dry and arid, therefore Bring Rishi blessed that area too. With the result some portion of water from Mawar Naag also flows towards Kishtwar and finally mixes with the mighty Chandrabagha (River Chenab) at Bandarkoot after passing through Chingaam, Chhatroo and Mughal Maidaan.

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According to Pt. Janki Nath Ji of Irkumoo, people used to do pend dhaan (offerings to the deceased people) at Pindubal. The importance of Pindubal has been revealed to him and to other people of his village by the old people of Irkumoo Biradari such as Pt. Shiv Ji Kak (his father), Pt. Maheshwer Nath and Pt. Tarachand Ji. The same has been endorsed by the late Purohit (Guru Ji) Pt. Kanth Kak of Sagam.

There is proper mention of Bring Rishi, Bringi and Bring (Breng) area in Nilamatapurana as well as Rajatarangini. The holy place of Pindubal needs to be protected and developed for religious tourism.

(The author is currently working as Assistant Executive Engineer in Mechanical Division (M.E.D.) Rajouri.)

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Short story

REVENGE

Amin Kamil

Translated from the Kashmiri by Prof Neerja Mattoo

Sattar was eighty now, but even now he had no idea of what his mother had meant when she told him that she had avenged his father. What kind of revenge had she taken on those butchers responsible for his father's death?

This story goes back to those old times when it was impossible to find a midwife to deliver a baby even if you went searching for one through thirty villages, least of all a skilled one like Jan Ded of Bonakoot village, whose miracle-working hands are a legend even now in the whole area for miles around. They say she was not too old, but the untimely death of her husband had brought her low. Having lost the head of the family and the only breadwinner, she was somehow eking out a miserable existence. Her back was bent and she had a hunch.

He had gone to fetch firewood for the house from the forest one day where he had an argument with Quadir Tsak of Herikoot, who had also come there for firewood. The argument heated up and the two rushed at each other's throats, where upon Quadir Tsak gave him a violent blow, which flung him against a tree stump. The impact cracked his skull and he was stone dead.

A long time after the incident, late one night in the dead of

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winter, there was a knocking at Jan Des's door. She woke up in confusion and pushed her window open. A group of three persons, wrapped in blankets from top to toe, stood outside her door. She called out, 'Who is it?'

There was silence---no one answered.

'What is it? God forbid, is there a problem? Please tell me quickly, the draught from the open window is creating too much of a chill!'

'We are...' with great hesitation one of them uttered a few words.

'Who is 'we'? Don't you have a name?'

Again there was silence. Jan Ded was beginning to lose her patience now.

'God have mercy! Have you left your tongues at home?'

'Lady ...we are from...Herikoot village,' one of them uttered haltingly. The word 'Herikoot' stunned Jan Ded into silence. Now it seemed as if it was she who had lost her tongue. The image of her husband carrying a load of firewood into the yard rose before her eyes. He eyes clouded over and her face seemed to be dyed like the yellow of a butter cup. But soon she gathered herself and asked in a hollow voice, 'What brings you here so late at night and in this terrible cold?'

'Respected lady, we have a daughter...in the family way. It is her first delivery...'

'Whose daughter is she? As if I don't know all of them there!'

'She is ours... I mean... Quadir Tsak's', reluctantly answered one of the men.

The very sound of the name Quadir Tsak instantly woke Jan Ded's son Sattar from a deep sleep. 'Who is

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it?' he called out to his mother.

'These are people from Herikoot, son,' Jan Ded turned her face away.

'To hell with these killers! Let whoever they have come for - die!' Sattar was furious.

'Please leave, I will follow presently,' Jan Ded said in a comforting voice.

'No, madam, please come with us, we will wait. The road is not too good. Besides it is about to snow again.'

'So what if it snows? Is it something new for me? You go along, I will be there.'

'No madam', it was Quadir Tsak's son who spoke. 'Let all your ills fall on us, please, we beg of you, come with us. You might change your mind, we fear.'

'Oh that will never be! You go, I will have Sattar go with me for a company.'

'The hell I will go! I would rather wipe away the whole tribe!' They must have heard Sattar, perhaps. After they left, he turned to his mother, 'Have you forgotten father? Will you go to deliver these murderers' daughter's baby, mother?'

'Son, I always pray to God that a time should come when these people need my help. Now that time has come. Didn't you see how their own deeds come to haunt them? How fear and helplessness have blackened their faces as though with soot? Is that not enough punishment for them?'

The distance to Herikoot was about a mile or so over flat road and another mile over a slippery hill track. Two days of incessant rain had turned it into slush. With a bad back, Jan Ded was finding it difficult to keep her balance. Sattar, barely

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fourteen, was walking beside her, holding a little burning pine branch as a torch.

Quadir Tsak's family had no hope that Jan Ded would come. After all, the scene of that violent deed was still before her eyes. When they saw her staggering in, after trudging over hill and plain, they could not believe their eyes. They were stunned, as if turned to stone, each one of them. Jan Ded took the scene in and after a pause, said, 'Why do you have such a hangdog look on your faces? Why don't you relax? Come on, talk to each other, sing that popular one, *Katyu chhuk nundbane, valo maashuk myane* ('Where are you my handsome one! Come back to me, my beloved!').' She laughed and then asked, 'Where is the little creature?' This was the term she used for all young women, daughters or daughters-in-law.

They led her to the inner room where Zeba, the daughter, lay in labour crying out as the pains came. The room was full of women, neighbours who just sat around, some resting their heads on their knees, tired of waiting for the baby to come. She came to the girl and said, 'Why are you kicking up such a racket? You have to give birth, so go on, do it! But you could at least have waited for the morning. Why did you choose this unearthly hour?'

'She has been in this state since the morning, madam,' Quadir Tsak's wife, Khurshid, spoke in a low voice.

'Was it I who made her find a husband and be in this state'? Said Jan Ded and then turned to Zeba, 'That nincompoop must be snoring away at home after leaving you with your parents to suffer the agony of this push and pull.' She smiled to herself and said to Khurshid, 'Do you have hot water? Bring it in, but first give me a kangri, I am frozen! Why didn't you send for me during the day? Or did you think that the baby

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would come out crawling by itself? Let me tell you, it is holding the little creature tight in its embrace!' and she began to warm her face against the kangri.

'And how are you all doing?' she turned to the other women and neighbours sitting around.

'Oh we are OK, madam. God keep you well too.'

'Oh what should be wrong with me? I am fine.' She turned to another one, 'Is that little one, your daughter's son all right? He must be a grown-up boy now with God's grace!'

'Oh yes, madam. He goes to the Maulvi to learn the Quran.'

Sattar, Quadir Tsak and a few other men were sitting in the outer room, putting away at one chillum after another. They could hear the conversation from the inner room and, in fact, every one of them concentrating on listening to it. Quadir Tsak was praying inwardly for the safety of his daughter.

Jan Ded washed her hands and attended to Zeba, she used her special skills and eased Zeba's struggle and the baby was delivered. But the baby did not cry, nor was there a stir in his arms or legs. Zeba's mother began to beat her breast and screamed, 'What happened to him? Why doesn't he cry?'

'God in heaven! Did I stop him?' Jan Ded frowned. 'Come and make him cry. Am I stopping you?'

'Oh Mother! What has happened to him?' Zeba began to wail.

The shock to the people in the outer room, who heard it all, was palpable. Their faces fell and chins hung loose. Quadir Tsak had an ashen look. A ghastly pallor spread over his face and tears rose to his eyes. He was sure in his mind that Jan Ded

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had deliberately lost the baby. He looked at Sattar and found a smile on his face ---he was happy. He began to wring his hands.

Sattar wanted to jump with joy and shout, 'Father! You have been avenged! Mother has done it for you, she has strangled these killers' baby with her bare hands!'

Khurshid was sobbing away. Jan Ded turned to him and said, 'Why are you shedding these tears? Go and get a basin of cold water first, and then you can continue with your wails!'

The other women in the room were dumbly chewing their fingers as though choked. Khurshid was back with the basin of cold water. Jan Ded took the baby in her hands, gave him a quick dip first in hot water and then in the cold water basin. Then she took hold of his legs and began to give him a vigorous shaking. Khurshid could not bear to see this and begged, 'Please, Jan Ded, don't do this to him. Let it be, if this is what God willed...'

'You just shut up! Don't you quote Gospel to me!'

And she continued to concentrate on the baby and treated him to the same procedure three or four times: warm dip, cold dip followed by the vigorous shaking. Drops of perspiration fell from her strained face, as if a fire were raging inside her. Suddenly there was a stir in the baby's limbs and the sound of his loud wail broke the silence in the room, breathing life into everyone in the inner and outer rooms.

'You little devil!' burst out Jan Ded. 'Playing out a little drama? Do you want me to hold you by the legs again and give you another shaking? All right, I forgive you this once, for the sake of your mother.' Saying this, she laid the baby next to his mother. Only then did she heave a deep sigh and wipe off the sweat from her face, which broke into a happy smile.

While walking back towards her home, Sattar asked her, 'why

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didn't you take revenge on these killers of Father? Why didn't you throttle their baby? You told me yourself that you were waiting for an opportunity to get these wretches under your power.'

> 'I have taken my revenge, but you will not be able to understand it. You see, you are not a midwife.'

And Sattar, who is nearly eighty now, is still not able to comprehend what kind of revenge his mother had taken.

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Book reviews

Snow flames (Poetry)
By Prof Majrooh Rashid
Publisher: Ink Links
Publishing House, Srinagar
Year of Publication 2025
Pages 288
Price 500 Library Edition

Dr Abid Ahmad

Snow flames is the first collection of poems in English by Prof Majrooh Rashid, a former Professor in Kashmiri. Professor Majrooh, an acclaimed academic, poet, writer, researcher and translator has now shown his prowess in the realm of poetry in English language.

The poems included in the collection can be appreciated at two levels. We can read them as poems in English language and w can appreciate them as Kashmiri sensibility beautifully expressed in English idiom.

Why Professor Majrooh has lately chosen English over Kashmiri to express his creative ideas is quite intriguing. It may be his realization of having found Kashmiri wanting in certain areas where English might have come to his rescue. Or it could be his desire to reach a wider audience to convey his subtle truths. We live in an age of post truth, where truth is not just relative but personal. But what makes poetry relevant in this age too is that it turns personal truths into universal truths.

The collection makes one thing clear. Prof Majrooh Rashid is a polyglot who can write even on challenging topics in more than one language with equal felicity, ease and dash. He is capable of expressing himself in English language with natural spontaneity, musical flow and exquisite use of language.

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Let's begin with the title of the book. Snow Flames is not snow flakes. The misnomer needs to be decoded. Snow can put out flames. Flames can melt snow. How could the two be reconciled. Prof Majrooh too in his poetic outpourings in this collection tries to reconcile the different extremes of life, in the same way, though his approach is different, his treatment original, his idiom unique and his diction spontaneous. An overview of the index of the poems in the collection bears me out – solitary lamp, Wanton Birds, Frozen Dream, Midnight Illuminations, Heart's Cold Night,. Bite of Moonlight, Wooden Face, Worn out Tent, Fire and the Sky, Cashmere Pheran , Dusk to Dawn, unfamiliar silhouettes, green song, shadows from the past, cracked door, sylvan smell, etc.

Snow flames is a collections of lyrics that sing of life's colours, its love and loss, ups and downs, grief and joy, its fleeting moments, life gone into oblivion, life envisioned for times yet to come. It's a life recalled through memories, words, impressions, recollections, memories, thoughts, ideas, smiles and at times tears. It's a regret over the part of the life missed in the past, life lost in its din but lived to the full while absorbing its colours, pursuing its meaningful absurdism and attempting to win war against it which we all lose finally.

It delves into same universal human emotions like compassion, love, etc., which have always made humans distinct from animaldom:

Motherhood

To a connoisseur
A poem and an aesthete
An evening at *nalla mear*
Visiting my mother's grave

The collection keeps vacillating between past and present, a life gone and recalled and a life envisioned in future. Most of

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the poems employ flashback technique to make home the point:

Passing through
The narrow lane
Of the longest street
Of my memory –
I am once again here
Standing beside the electric pole
With the solitary flickering lamp
Looking up
To the window
Which would glisten
With the water of your eyes
And the highway leading
To the vale of spirit
Would blossom with my tears –
The window has been shut
And the solitary lamp of the electric pole
Too has stopped flickering

The symbols mentioned in the poems are slippery, fleeting and indeterminate -

The moment turned into a dome
And the bird that I tamed all my life
Got trapped in its dark hollowness

These whirling flakes
Gather layer by layer in the yard
And broaden its expanse

Symbols as understood in traditional parlance are stretched a bit to make them mean more. Take the poems like Dawn, Story, Path, Moon, children's day, etc., where traditional topics are given a new twist in consonance with constantly changing

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values and realities.

Word
Who am I?
A word given by the past
Pinned on the wall
Of an empty room
Covered by cobwebs
A blurred sketch of the future
Hung on it
Awaiting vision and colour.

Most of the poems are a sort of conversation with the self. That is what our canonical literature espouses through its style. Starting with Lal Ded's *Lall be tsaayas suman baaghe baras and Nund Reshi's ha zuwo paayas peto,* Kashmiri literature in its canonical format spawns a sort of communication with divinity or the divinity within. Borrowing from the same tradition, Prof Majrooh attempts to capture the same mood, tone and tenor, in most of his poems in this collection, reflecting a thoughtful, meditating and imaginative mind behind their conception.

Several poems in the collection address the various phenomena of nature in traditional frame of reference. Such poems include time, hope, illusion, dreams, change, etc. However, what makes the collection distinct is its idiom, diction, style, and treatment. A sizable number of poems are born of the latest understanding of the cosmos out there. Such poems include Black Hole, The Cosmic Path;

Black Hole
True
You had a cluster of stars around you
Held together
By the pull of a certain gravity
They all lived an ascetic life

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Save me
And personified truth.
And me?
I turned into a black hole
At the last moment
You were about to lose your very existence
In its emptiness.
I warned you
O big star!
But you did not listen,
Till everything was lost
Along with the sense of space and time.

Each poem is a dazzling dance of metaphors in the light of their symbolic meanings. However, the collection stands apart for its ability of bridging tradition and modernity, structure and style and meaning and meaninglessness at the same time.

As identified by Prof Bina Biswas, "this poetry collection... explores the poet's deep connection to nature....As an allegory, a metaphor, a lens through which he looks at the world – there are multiple ways in which nature serves the poet in this collection....There is no dearth of range, nor is there any lack of depth in feeling, as nature is the most crucial aspect of every single line springing forth from the poet's pen - that most strengthening , yet mysterious source of poetic elixir to lend the poems their rich sense of atmosphere and emotion."

Prof Neerja Mattoo sums it up so dexterously, "Prof Majrooh Rashid is a deeply sensitive poet of lyrical outbursts who can startle the reader with a novel image or a fresh turn of phrase, reminding the reader sometimes of Emily Dickenson, sometimes of William Blake. His creative search goes beyond the material."

Life is a tale spun out of disparate experiences, some good,

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some bad, some mixed, and some beyond any coloration. Life is not any neatly arranged sequence of events but we try to give this disparate and apparently disjointed sequence a pattern in our creative pursuits. This book is also an attempt at the same. Certainly poetry helps where life fails us.

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Burning Breeze (Poetry)
By Satish Safeer
Year of publication 2023
Pages 111
Price Rs.250/-
Publisher

Er. Vinod Kumar

Satish Kaul Safeer popularly known as Satish Safeer has come up with the printed form of his expressions under the title *Burning Breeze*. It is a collection of his English poems. Though Satish has been writing for quite a long time, it took him almost two decades to comes up with a book.

Burning Breeze is a beautifully designed laminated paperback edition of 110 pages. It's year of publication is 2023 and is priced at Rs. 250. The book is dedicated to late Sh. H.N. Tiku, Founder President "Samskar", a non-profit social help organisation, whom the author considers as his guide and mentor. The content page of the book shows a list of 85 poems. But to the surprise of the reader there are only 82 poems in the book. The last three poems listed in the contents page namely "Cross Road", "Passionate Connect" and "Far Away Garlands" are not found in the book.

The foreword of the book has been written by Professor R. L. Shant who describes the author as a person with a sensitive mind and throbbing pen and is open to accept literary influences across other languages.

In the preface of the book, Satish gives details about his family background, the literary interests of his family and how he entered into the journey of writing, although being a person

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from a different profession of agricultural science. Though Satish started writing during his student life, the forced mass exodus of 1990 shaped his imagination.

In this book Satish has written poems on love, nature, environment and nostalgia. Like most of his contemporaries, most of the poems in the collection reflect that he is conscious of the exile.

An exiled poet from Czechoslovakia, Broniskava Volkova, has said.

When people are forced into exile, they weep 'over what has been lost, over what was and what will be, and mostly over what won't ever be'. To them every memory becomes sharp as a knife, and their life turns into 'life in the middle of nowhere.

Satish Safeer's poems dramatise all these aspects of exile in ample measure. His expression of the circumstances permeates the texture of most of his poems in the book.

Khalil Gibran, the famous Lebanese poet once said, "A poet is like a dethroned king sitting on the debris of his demolished palace and trying to make an image of his lost kingdom out of the ashes." In the poem titled 'My Vale' Satish writes

How soothing it was there
and how I languish here.
Oh! How I long to be in my vale
though it has become but a sordid tale.

The title poem "Burning Breeze' draw the attention of the reader in a forceful manner:

Yet how can we cull
our longing and our agony
of separation from
our ancestral abode
our pound of mother lode

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that our valley was for us
changed though we our dress.
Our brows developed permanent crease
As we inhale
this burning breeze,
a piece loving tribe
that lost its ease.

In some poems of the book the poet has touched the subject of love. These poems are 'O! Glassy Heart', 'Torrents' and 'Ever Glowing Amber'. The poet has beautifully described nature through some poems in the book. These poems are 'Setting Sun' and 'A Long Lease.'

Jean Paul Sartre, a renowned French philosopher, playwright, novelist and literary critic argues that literature has a social and political dimension. He suggests that literature is a way of engaging with society and of challenging the status quo. By presenting alternative visions of the world, literature has the power to inspire change and promote social progress.

The poet has shown his concern for the protection of environment. Such feelings are expressed in the poems like 'Cycle of Rain' and 'God's Gift-Environment'.

The poet also gives indication to the readers about the ultimate reality of life in the poem titled 'Death Kill'.

On the whole Satish Safeer has tried to cover nostalgia, exile-consciousness, nature, environment, love, sweet and sour memories, etc. in his maiden book. His free verse is impressive and clear in the expression of emotional equivalents.

As pointed out in the foreword of the book, Satish tries to be faithful to metre and rhyming words, though now we are living in the world of free-verse poems in almost all languages. Today the modern reader focuses on the usage of words in the meaningful verses rather than metre and rhyming patterns. At

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some places the rhyming attempts of the poet under discussion seem to be a result of overworking and seems to be conjured up. As a result, some poems seem losing their poetic quality because of this overworking. The basic thought in a few poems of the book has been waylaid in a forced search for sounding similarity.

Just like his guide and mentor, late Sh. H.N. Tiku, one can find the frequent use of complex vocabulary in most of the poems in the collection. No doubt there was a period of using complex words in the past literature. But the trend has changed. Such words are avoided now as they also hamper the flow of poetic thought and dampen the interest of the reader. In this age of computers, laptops, smart phones, Artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, social media and T-20 cricket, if we want to attract our young generation towards literature, we have to use simple vocabulary in our prose and poetry. Nowadays literary expressions requiring frequent use of dictionary or google are avoided.

Another point worth noting in the collection is the scarce use of punctuation marks. This could be the latest trend but occasional use of punctuation marks helps the reader make meaning.

The contents of the book indicate that the poet has an unsatiable thirst for life and nature. He narrates the creative pieces telling the story directly.

To sum up, the poetry collection *Burning Breeze* is worth reading for lovers of poetry in English language. This book can be considered as another drop in the ocean of 'Literature in Exile' post 1990. This is Satish Safeer;s maiden publication. Pertinently Satish tries his hand in writing poetry and prose in Hindi, Urdu and Kashmiri too. But such writings are yet to come in the market in published form. It is hoped that Satish will keep coming out with more such collections of his creative writing. This review of *Burning Breeze* is concluded with a

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couplet of the legendary Kashmiri poet Arzan Dev Majboor:

dale'ky pamposh da'dimit syekilyenei manz
karaan naaras andar chhee phwolnukui sanz

The lotus flowers of the Dal Lake having dried up in deserts,
Are beginning to bloom in raging fire.

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Shahnawaz Majid

She would have loved Srinagar

She would have loved Srinagar,
not just for its serene lakes and landscape
or its crispy chinar leaves,
but for being the city of her love
whose name I have whispered in its winds
a thousand times.

She would have sat by Dal,
not knowing its waters knew her
for I had told it of her eyes,
and that they held heavens within.

She would have walked in its gardens,
not knowing each flower had bloomed

Waiting for her silent steps

Imagined eaons ago.

She would have wandered through Polo View Market,
elegant, composed, comely,
looking at shawls and Kashmiri artefacts,

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oblivious that every weave and carved work
had long awaited her touch.

And surely, she would have visited the Dargah Hazratbal,
where the sacred relic is kept,
where the breeze carries eternal prayers.
Beneath the white dome there
she would have stood in quiet reverence,
and I believe
most of her supplications
would have been about me.

Her lips may not have uttered my name aloud,
but prayers are said
without words too.

Srinagar is beautiful, yes,
but to me, it is sacred,
for it is filled with the unseen presence
of the one I love,
who could never walk its paths
but lives in every corner of its memory.

Whispers to the river

Whenever I pass by the Jehlum
in my hometown of Srinagar,
near Zero Bridge,
where my silences lean over the railing,
a strange comfort touches me,
as I listen to the river carrying what I could never say.
For this water flows unhindered
to my love.

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Sometimes I whisper to the river,
"Take something of me with you."
A bunch of daffodils and roses
floats from my hands to hers,
not to claim, not to cry,
but to say:
"You are remembered in full bloom."
And though my voice may never reach you,
perhaps the river
will whisper my heart
where words cannot.

Sometimes I wish I too
were the water of Jehlum,
slipping past mounts and mounds,
to reach her feet like a quiet prayer.

For this river sees what I cannot.
It touches what I may never hold again.
And in that flow,
I find both comfort and sorrow,
realising that rivers are freer than lovers.

Satyam Shivam Sundaram

Satyam Shivam Sundaram
I beheld her,
not merely with my eyes,
but from the depths of a heart
where truth hides in dreams.

In her silence
was an eternal light,
like the night vigil of a dervish,

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where every moment
takes the form of worship.

She was not merely a face,
but a divine manifestation,
a gnosis
that descends upon the heart suddenly,
estranging one
from their own self,
merging the soul
into the unity of the Divine.

Each gesture of hers was a sign,
every touch soft as a prayer,
every glance
as if bearing witness to the universe,
proclaiming beauty as the gateway to truth.

Satyam in her gaze,
gleaming like eternal truth,
Shivam in her every breath,
proclaiming the Divine's presence,
Sundaram in the curve of her countenance,
singing the harmony of the cosmos.

Then I realized
love is not mere desire,
but a quest
that converges at the confluence
of Satyam Shivam Sundaram.

And when love
becomes the embodiment of these three qualities,

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their vision
becomes pure worship,
as if in a single moment,
the soul merges with the light of the cosmos.

The rag I tied for her

(At the Dargah of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali, Chrar-e-Sharif)

It was no ordinary day,
and the Dargah of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali,
in the mystic town of Chrar-e-Sharif,
was no ordinary place.
It was a place where even tears cry
and silence speaks
where every stone listens,
and the wind knows the names we never speak aloud.
I came with trembling hands,
not carrying offerings of flowers or coins,
but the ache of her absence,
the heaviness of a name etched into my soul.

I stood beneath the ancient chinar,
and tied a small votive rag
to the shrine's sacred lattice,
not for health, not for wealth,
but for her,
the sovereign of my heart.

And there, with a soul stripped bare, I prayed:
"Ya Allah,
You who know even the prayers never spoken,
let her be written in my fate,
not as a fleeting chapter,
but as the whole story.

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If love is a path toward You,
then let this love be my worship.
Let the winds bear my longing to You,
and if not for union,
then grant me patience
enough to carry her name
like a sacred fire inside me
till the end of time."

No voice replied.
But the breeze stirred gently,
and the votive cloth fluttered,
as if the silence itself had whispered,
"You have been heard."

Nothing changed outside
everything changed within.

Quiet bloom

When she,
the once-named queen of my heart,
shares pictures of her happy family life
on social media,
I do not break.
I bloom, quietly.

Because once,
love was ours,
but now it belongs
to memory.
And even memory
can watch from afar

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and smile.

She looks cared for, safe, and peaceful.
She looks graceful in her smile
as if serenity itself chose her face
to rest upon.

And though my arms are empty,
my heart feels full,
not with possession,
but with prayer.
If she is happy,
then I,
I can survive one more day
without air,
without light,
but not without that smile.

Her picture

These fingers of mine,
longing for the touch of her,
often wander into my phone's gallery,
zooming in
on love's pictures.

And then,
they trace, for a long while,
the contours of her face,
gently, slowly,
as if each line could soothe
this quiet ache within.
And in that moment,
my forlorn heart

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is fooled into believing
that
I've almost touched my love.

The anodyne of her name

When the pain of separation
becomes too heavy to bear,
I whisper my love's name,
not in desperation,
but as an act of consecration.

And in that sacred utterance,
the ache softens,
turning into an anodyne
that soothes the soul
like evening rain.

That anodyne brings not just relief,
but pure, wordless bliss,
the kind that only love,
stripped of possession,
can give.

An ocean of longing

Even if an ocean trickled down from my eyes,
it would still be too little,
for what are waves
before the storm of longing she's left behind?

I carry a sea within me,
one drop for every memory,
one tide for every unspoken word.

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And still,
I would drown a thousand times more
just to see her smile once again,
or listen,
just once,
to her whisper
fall like dew upon my name.

The temple of the heart

In Shabari's eyes, there was longing,
And in her heart, only devotion.
No palace, no sacred chants, no royal throne,
Just a quiet plate, filled with love.

Rama came,
For He was called with a heart so pure,
In that call burned the fire of yearning,
And the light of true faith.
When faith is like Shabari's,
Rama surely comes,
He grants His divine presence,
In the temple of the heart.

The unfinished sentence

She was meant
to adorn my life,
not just as a memory,
but as a presence,
a prayer answered,
a name whispered in contentment.

But fate, cruel and silent,

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wrote her into someone else's chapter,
made her someone else's solace,
while I remained
the unfinished sentence,
the unread page.

She lives,
but not in my life.
She smiles,
but not at my side.
And yet
I love her
in the quiet,
in the ache,
in spaces no one sees.

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Heena Mahajan

I walked through days like a ghost

I walked through days like a ghost
half alive, half hidden,
carrying truths I could not speak
and lies I refused to tell.

When they asked me to lie,
I stood silent.
Not because I had no answer,
but because the truth inside me
deserved more dignity
than their expectations.

My silence was not emptiness—
it was a battlefield.
A place where my trembling heart
fought alone
to keep the truth breathing.

In winter mornings,
my face froze into stillness.
A mask carved by cold winds

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and heavier memories.
Expressionless.
Motionless.
Yet full of storms
no one ever saw.

I wore smiles
that never touched my eyes.
I carried frowns
that never reached my lips.
I learned the art
of looking "fine"
while falling apart quietly
behind my own ribs.
Some days,
even my shadow felt distant
as if it, too, sensed
that I wasn't fully here anymore.

My tears learned silence
before I did.
They slid down
in the stillness of night,
when the world was asleep
and only the truth kept me awake.

I swallowed words
that begged for freedom.
I held my breath
through fears no one knew.
Every second of silence
felt like a cut—

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sharp, deep, unseen.

And yet,
I stayed silent.
Because if my voice broke,
the truth would break with it.

So I walked
through days like a ghost,
through nights like a stranger
to my own reflection,
through winters
that froze more than just skin.

But even in that cold,
even in that emptiness,
one thing inside me
remained warm—
the truth I protected
with every drop of my pain.

I did not lie.
Though silence crushed me,
I let it.
I carried the weight
so the truth could stay untouched.

And someday
if someone listens closely
they will hear everything
in the spaces
where I said nothing.

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